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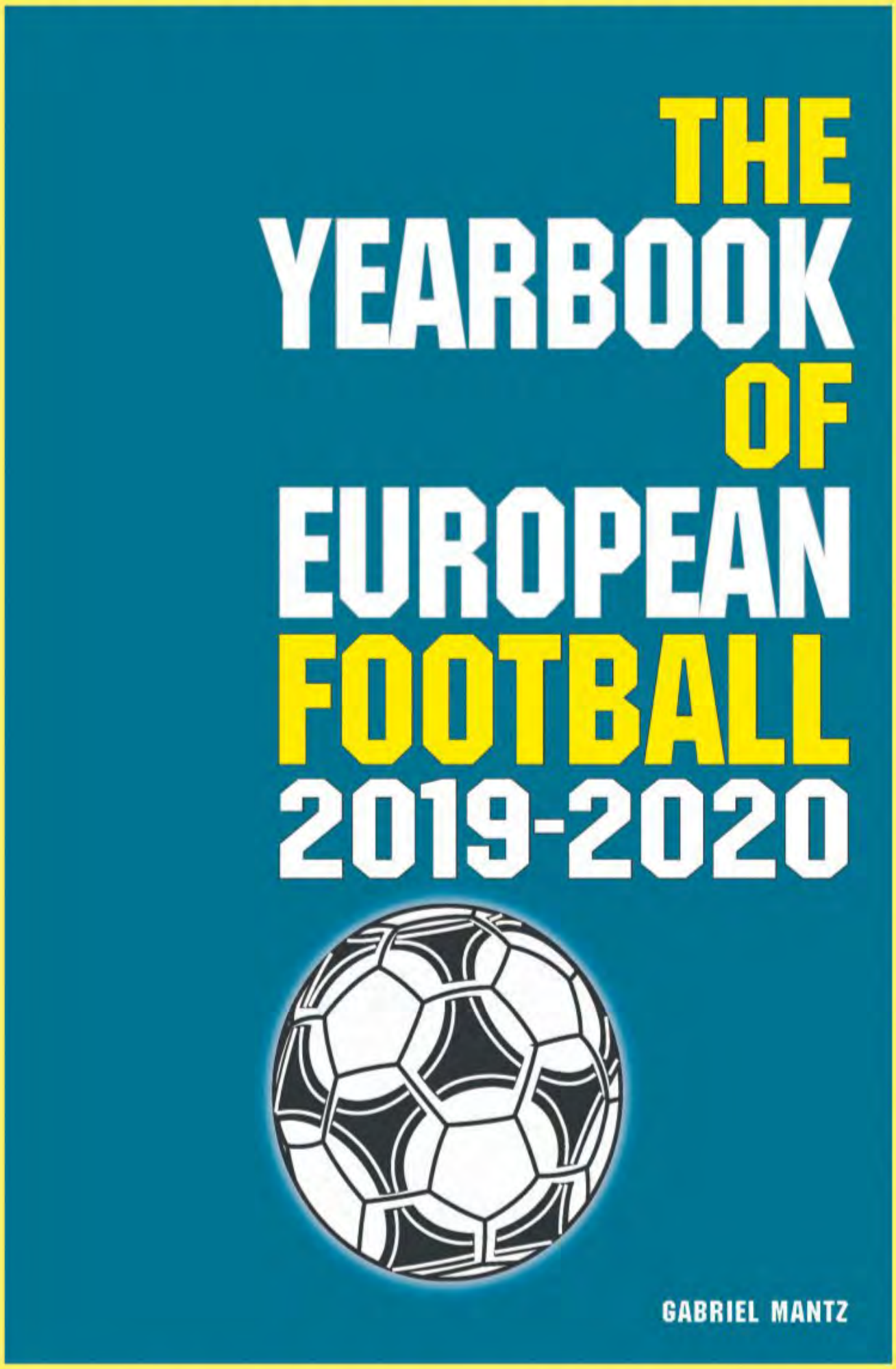

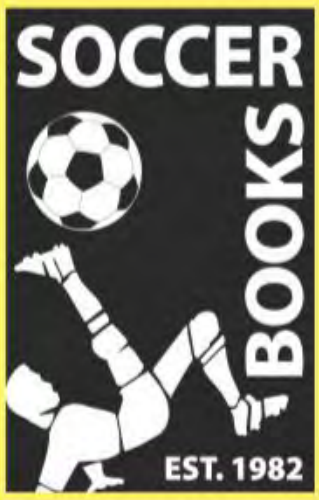

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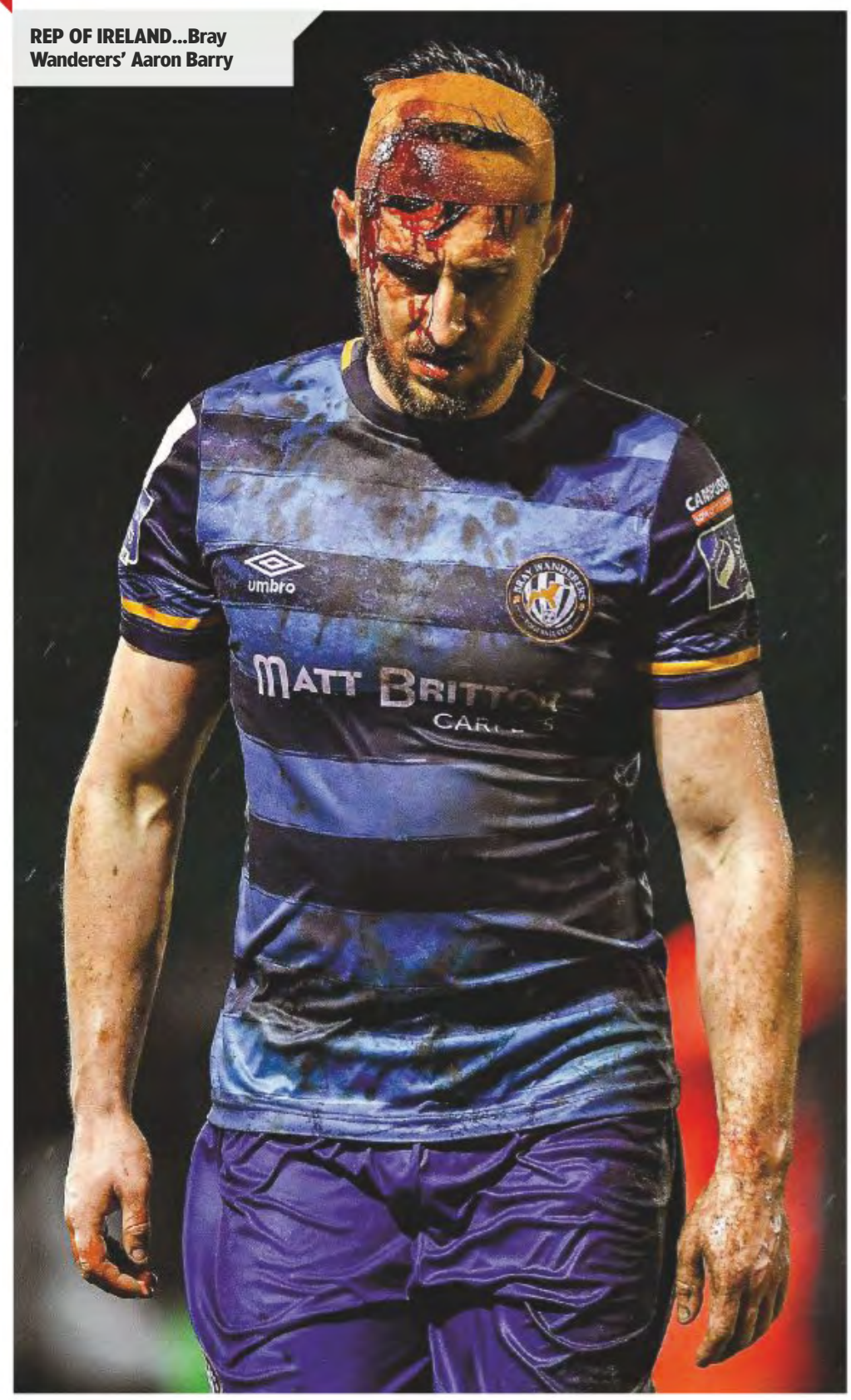

REP OF IRELAND...Bray Wanderers' Aaron Barry

ENGLAND...Raul Jimenez scores for Wolves against Norwich City

SPAIN...Barcelona's Lionel Messi gets his shot away despite the efforts of two Real Sociedad players

TURKEY...Playing football on the frozen surface of Lake Cildir, near the border with Georgia and Armenia

ITALY...Sassuolo v Brescia is played behind closed doors due to coronavirus

FRANCE...Lille's players celebrate a goal at home to Lyon

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FROM THE EDITOR

By the time you read this, Euro 2020 is likely to have been delayed until later this year, or even next year.

It will be a major shock if the tournament has been cancelled completely. Cash is king in modern football, and the Euros generate most of UEFA's disposable income; in contrast, the Champions League may be a money-driven competition, but most of its surplus is channelled back to the competing clubs in prize money and TV "market pool" payments. Many of the smaller member federations of UEFA, who make up a political majority within the organisation, rely heavily on financial support from the continental governing body.

Ironically, the format of Euro 2020 was designed to spread football's wealth more equally around the continent, from Baku to Bucharest. But the pan-continental structure has served only to aid the spread of coronavirus.

> Whether football learns any lessons from this global pandemic remains to be seen

Whether football learns any lessons from this global pandemic remains to be seen. The international calendar is already stretched to breaking point, with UEFA and FIFA on a collision course over plans for an expanded Club World Cup next summer.

Will smaller clubs be compensated for loss of income from postponed matches? Will fans be recompensed by clubs and TV companies? It is supporters, after all, who fund the game through their season tickets and TV subscriptions. Perhaps everybody has to take a hit and acknowledge that, in the future, less can be more.

Whatever happens to the remainder of the 2019-20 season, some stories deserve to be recognised. Atalanta's passage to the quarter-finals of the Champions League is no flash-in-the-pan tale (page 42). And much has already been written about teenager Erling Haaland (page 48) but his remarkable performances demand further attention.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

Deep clean...Ankaragucu's Eryaman Stadium in Turkey

Football shuts down with unprecedented worldwide postponements

CHINA

The Chinese Super League, set to start on February 22, was postponed indefinitely with many clubs moving training camps to the Middle East. The league is unlikely to restart before May.

AFC

AFC Champions League group matches in the eastern zone were postponed until April 7, with the knockout stage delayed until August. The first two rounds of group matches in West Asia took place but subsequent rounds were then postponed.

The World Cup qualifiers due to take place in March and June have been postponed and are not likely to be played until September and October.

ITALY

Serie A matches were suspended until April 3 after a Juventus player, Daniele Rugani, became the league's first player to test positive. Before the postponement, a number of games,

"You play a game of football and then realise what is happening worldwide – people dead and dying. Then we play a game of football. It's absurd"

Wolverhampton Wanderers manager Nuno Espirito Santo after his team were forced to play their Europa League game against Olympiakos behind closed doors in Athens

Positive test ...Daniele Rugani

including Juventus-Internazionale, were played behind closed doors.

JAPAN
The the new J.League season kicked off but was postponed after the opening round of games. A further decision to postpone the league is expected.

SWITZERLAND
The Swiss league became the first European competition to be postponed after the government banned all gatherings of over 1,000 people.

GERMANY
The match between Borussia Monchengladbach and Cologne became the first *Geisterspiel* (game played behind closed doors) in the history of the Bundesliga. Two Hanover players, Timo Hubers and Jannes Horn, were the first Germany-based players to test positive, prompting all Bundesliga and 2 Bundesliga games to be suspended until April 2.

Borussia Dortmund became the first European club to cancel a summer tour of China and Asia, while the 2006 World Cup corruption trial was delayed after ex-DFB bosses stayed at home, pleading coronavirus concerns because of their age.

SOUTH KOREA
The start of the K.League was postponed indefinitely, while the Korean FA cancelled the World Cup qualifiers set for March and June.

FRANCE
All Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 matches have been postponed indefinitely.

Paris Saint-Germain's Champions League round-of-16 second leg against Borussia Dortmund was played behind closed doors, but PSG ultras congregated outside the stadium at Parc des Princes to celebrate their side's victory.

Marseille coach Andre Villas-Boas criticised those, saying: "It's ridiculous. For them it was a great celebration, but think about your family. If I found out my family was infected indirectly by someone in the crowd, I'd file a complaint against the police."

SPAIN
La Liga was suspended after the Real Madrid squad were placed in quarantine following a positive test for a basketball player (the basketball team share a sporting training complex with the football team).

The Copa del Rey Final, the all-Basque tie between Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad due to be played on April 18, had already been postponed. Spanish federation Luis Rubiales said they should wait "as long as it takes until fans can be in the stands".

Getafe's Europa League tie with Internazionale was cancelled after the Spanish side refused to travel to Italy.

GREECE
Olympiakos owner Evangelos Marinakis announced on social media that he had had a "visit" from the coronavirus.

Historic...a first for the Bundesliga

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
The FAI announced the suspension of all football activity until March 29 after Linfield confirmed that one of their players had tested positive.

ENGLAND
After initially following government advice to carry on playing matches, all games in the Premier League, FA Cup and Football League were postponed until April 3. The decision followed positive tests for Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta and Chelsea midfielder Callum Hudson-Odoi.

FIFA
The annual FIFA Congress, scheduled to be held in Ethiopia in June, has been postponed until September.

SOUTH AMERICA
The CONMEBOL World Cup qualifying section, due to kick off in March, was postponed, while group matches in the Copa Libertadores were also suspended.

USA
Seattle Sounders were the first MLS side to postpone a match, calling off their March 21 home game against Dallas. That was followed by a general league-wide suspension for at least

Closed doors... Valencia host Atalanta

"We've been waiting 100 years for this. It would be nonsense if it didn't happen"

Finnish FA secretary Marco Casagrande laments the prospect of Euro 2020 being postponed

30 days until the middle of April. The USA internationals in March were also postponed.

ARGENTINA

All sporting events in Buenos Aires were ordered to be played behind closed doors.

UEFA

UEFA came under fire for the delay in talking to its member federations about postponing its competitions. A decision was expected on March 17 over rescheduling of the Champions League and Europa League, and a possible delay or postponement of Euro 2020.

The immediate problem was the Euro 2020 play-offs. Romania, with many players based in Italy and the USA who would be unable to travel, asked for their tie in Iceland to be cancelled. Similarly Bosnia asked UEFA to postpone their game with Northern Ireland and the Slovakian FA asked UEFA to postpone their match against Republic of Ireland.

The second leg, round-of-16 Champions

Empty...Juan Domingo Peron stadium in Buenos Aires

League matches Manchester City v Real Madrid and Juventus v Lyon were postponed, prompting serious doubts over whether the competition could be completed this season.

The Europa League was thrown into chaos with the Sevilla v Roma and Internazionale v Getafe last-16 first legs postponed. LASK against Manchester United was played behind closed doors, with United paying £350 towards the travel costs of every supporter who bought a ticket for the game in Austria. Wolves' request to postpone their game against Olympiakos in Athens was denied by UEFA.

CONCACAF

The CONCACAF Champions League was suspended with immediate effect

PORTUGAL

Portugal suspended its top-tier and second-tier league championships.

IRAN

Reports that Elham Sheikhi of Iranian futsal team from Qom had died of the virus were false, although someone with the same name and from the same city had passed away.

HEROES & VILLAINS

Stopper...Saarbrucken keeper Daniel Batz

DANIEL BATZ

The goalkeeper for South west Regional League team Saarbrucken was the hero of their German Cup win against Fortuna Dusseldorf when he saved a penalty in normal time followed by four more saves in the penalty shoot-out as his side won 7-6 on spot-kicks to reach the semi-finals.

SON HEUNG-MIN

The South Korean striker fractured his right arm in a first-minute challenge with Aston Villa's Ezri Konsa but played on and scored twice in Tottenham Hotspur's 3-2 victory. His double saw him become the first Asian player to score 50 goals in the Premier League.

NAHUEL GUZMAN

The Tigres goalkeeper scored a 94th-minute stoppage-time winner with a header for his club in the CONCACAF Champions League encounter with Alianza of El Salvador to seal a 5-4 aggregate win.

Scorer...Tigres keeper Nahuel Guzman

ATALANTA FANS

The Italian club's supporters received a rebate for their travel expenses after their Champions League tie in Valencia was played behind closed doors. En masse, they donated the €60,000 to a local hospital treating coronavirus victims.

Long wait...Al Ahly's opponents Zamalek didn't show

ZAMALEK

The Egyptian club failed to turn up to the Cairo derby against Al Ahly after sanctions were handed to players and officials from both clubs following a brawl when the teams last met. Zamalek claim they had been delayed in traffic and could not make the match on time.

AGIM ADEMI

The president of the Football Federation of Kosovo was jailed for nine months after he and a friend attempted to coerce a business partner into making a municipal official in Pristina falsify documents relating to a real-estate deal. Ademi became FFK chief in July 2018.

CARLOS CORDEIRO

The president of US Soccer Federation had to resign after taking responsibility for the language used in court papers submitted in an equal pay case that claimed the US women's team were "less skilled" and "had fewer responsibilities than their male colleagues".

SERGIO RAMOS

His sending-off against Manchester City equalled the four Champions League red cards of Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Edgar Davids. It was the 33-year-old's 26th dismissal playing for Real Madrid.

Familiar sight...Sergio Ramos sees red

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

This Liverpool deserve their place in the history books

Every week along the way of Liverpool's formidable streak of winning matches in the Premier League you could hear Jurgen Klopp say it was of no consequence to him. He was adamant about his indifference and swatted away endless questions with casual disdain.

That is the modern psychology: focus only on the next match, never on a target in the distance, never on potential glory, and certainly never on a place in the history books. But Klopp was fooling nobody.

Every manager is aware of the numbers in football. Statistics are endlessly dissected and Klopp certainly knew the greatness of the Liverpool figures as each week passed.

It slipped out one day when somebody asked him about the long unbeaten run of league matches, which had then moved into the 40s and within sight of the English all-time record of 49 set by Arsenal.

He responded with a reference to the last time Liverpool had lost, a 2-1 defeat away at Manchester City in January 2019, saying: "We could say we were beaten because of 11 millimetres [the distance that goal-line technology showed how close a shot by Sadio Mane was to crossing the line]. It was a really tight game, so imagine if we had drawn that day. I don't know what the number would be of how many games we didn't lose."

Eleven millimetres is a tiny fraction of distance. Klopp knew its significance all right, and he wanted the world to know too. Without that 11mm Liverpool's unbeaten run would have been 66 league games before it ended with a 3-0 defeat away to Watford.

In the event, the sequence was one defeat in 66 games: a feat that no club has ever achieved in a major European league.

> One defeat in 66 games is a feat that no club has ever achieved in a major European league

"I have never heard of anything like it," said Klopp, and he was correct. This figure should be an impossibility in a sport as demanding and competitive as elite football.

Let's put this into context. Manchester City lost three matches in 38 to win the Premier League last season. Bayern Munich lost four in 34 to clinch the Bundesliga and Juventus lost four in 38 to capture Serie A. One defeat in 66 is unparalleled consistency. So is another Liverpool statistic: winning 26 of the opening 27 league matches this term, and drawing the other.

When the magic run ended on a bitterly cold night at Watford it was followed by another loss in the FA Cup as Klopp rested half of his regular side.

A reaction was bound to occur. But that does not diminish the achievement of the Liverpool team of 2018-20. Their greatness is unimpeachable.

Jan Molby, who played in the last Liverpool side to win the English top flight title, in 1990, is convinced of that, saying: "This team will go down in history, not just as a great Liverpool team but in the big scheme of things as one of the best football teams we have ever seen. I have no doubt about that."

Klopp's Liverpool may not be the most beautiful side, although they have their moments of coruscating style, but they are endlessly entertaining. They are spectacular, they are imposing, they are dynamic and they are intelligent.

There is authority through the spine of the team, from goalkeeper Alisson to defensive colossus Virgil Van Dijk and their noisy, robust captain Jordan Henderson.

There is creativity from Roberto Firmino and the artful pair of full-backs Trent Alexander-Arnold and Andy Robertson. There is panache from Mo Salah and Mane.

There is also another vital ingredient in the mix: the emotional bond between the team and their supporters which has been cleverly cultivated by Klopp.

You sense it most surely after matches, when the crowd does not leave Anfield at the final whistle. Instead, they stay in their places in every part of the stadium to savour the mood and magic of a unique period.

They know their football at Liverpool. They know they are witnessing a special moment in time. WS

Worth celebrating...Liverpool are closing in on their first league championship for 30 years

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Virus sends international calendar into meltdown

One effect of the coronavirus crisis has been to throw into stark relief the scheduling crisis affecting football at international and domestic level.

Swiss Football Association president Dominique Blanc has warned, after a ban on gatherings of more than 1,000 people in the country, that medium-sized and small FAs might soon be seeking financial support from both the world and European federations.

Meanwhile, ties in the east zone of the AFC Champions League have been postponed, as have regional qualifiers in Asia for the 2022 World Cup. And in Europe questions are being asked about the prospects for this summer's Euro 2020.

Wholesale postponements in Italy, along with and government isolation orders, not only threw the concluding months of Serie A into doubt but were also poised to spread upwards and affect the Champions League and Europa League.

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin and general-secretary Theo Theodorakis have talked of decisions on a "case by case" basis, but they are as much in the dark as anyone else in not knowing whether the crisis will ease or extend.

However, there is one factor on which everyone gathered for a recent UEFA Congress in Amsterdam is agreed: the calendar is so tight that there is no room for manoeuvre, with no dates for wholesale postponements and rearrangement – even if anyone had a clue about when rearrangement might even be a practical possibility.

Club managers and players' unions have railed for years at the damaging overload on the health of both football and footballers, but no decision-maker has taken notice while the money keeps rolling in from ratings-greedy sponsors and television companies.

Prospects for worldwide agreement on such an essential foundation of the competitive game will be hard to achieve when so many other issues need to be worked out in the game's corridors of power.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino – who, presumably, was the target of Ceferin's exasperated "egos" jibe to UEFA Congress – is still busy chasing the funds needed to underpin his pet project for an expanded Club World Cup in China in the summer of next year.

Not that Ceferin himself has it easy, as he and his own "stakeholders" still appear far away from agreement on an expanded format for the Champions League.

All of this apparently prompted US promoters Relevent to posit a Champions League-type summer tournament across the globe in summer 2021. Or was Relevent merely trying to remain relevant – so to speak – now that coronavirus has undermined this year's schedule?

The cumulative effect of the coronavirus outbreak has been to confront the game with its most urgent challenge: a calendar in meltdown.

> Questions are being asked about the prospects for this summer's Euro 2020

Precaution...fans wear masks at a game in Japan

Racist abuse still continues

Following racist abuse from fans of his former club Vitoria Guimaraes, Porto striker Moussa Marega walked off the pitch in protest during a recent Portuguese league game.

Yet, shamefully, match officials still appear to be reluctant to open their ears and act on the evidence during games. Maybe referees have an excuse, with their assistants' advice plugged into one ear. But fourth officials have no such excuse. Nor, in international competition, do match delegates.

In the last three seasons UEFA has imposed 73 partial stadium closures and ordered 39 matches to be played behind closed doors because of incidents of discrimination.

Clearly the message is insufficient and has gone unheeded.

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin told Congress in Amsterdam: "Many of us have been sickened by what we have witnessed in a number of European stadiums this season.

"Diversity [in football] is greater than in any other sport. We must begin by applying the rules we already have. That would be a good starting point. That means applying the three-step procedure. We must not be afraid to do so. Everywhere. No exceptions."

Merely sticking to the letter of the law would be a start.

Abused...Porto's Moussa Marega

Tactical shift

Passed, almost unnoticed, was this year's 100th anniversary of the birth of Alf Ramsey, the only man to guide England to World Cup glory. He was born on January 22, 1920, and died, aged 79, on April 28, 1999.

Ramsey's reputation has suffered from a mistaken modernist presumption that English managers were all tactical dunces by comparison with the multi-titled, multi-lingual foreign coaches who have bestrode the Premier League over the last 30 years.

Revisionists credit Herbert Chapman – or was it Charlie Buchan? – for devising the WM with a stopper centre-half to combat the goal rush sparked by the offside law change in 1925. Probably Chapman and/or Buchan garnered most of the credit because the English league was the most visible.

But simultaneously, in Switzerland, Austrian coach Karl Rappan was devising the "Swiss Bolt", in which the two full-backs moved into the heart of defence and the wing-halves dropped into their full-back slots, creating the forerunner of *catenaccio*.

In the 1940s and early 1950s, as player numbering became universal, evolution brought new visible changes in South America. The numbers told the tale: in Argentina number four became the right-back with number two a centre-back alongside the six; in Uruguay numbers two and three became the centre-backs; in Brazil it was the three who became the second centre-back, alongside five, while six became the left-back.

On both banks of the River Plate the old centre-half – the number five – remained a kingpin, hence a dynasty stretching from Nestor Rossi in the 1940s through to Antonio Rattin in the 1960s.

Hungary, in the early 1950s, were an adjusted version of the WM with balanced wing-halves and a deep-lying centre-forward. Manchester City aped that with the "Revie Plan" which involved centre-forward Don Revie dropping deep. After early success it became too obvious. By the time Revie moved on to Sunderland in the late 1950s he was just one more traditional inside-forward.

But the pursuit of novelty persisted. West Ham United were the first English club to copy the clearly-defined 4-2-4 with which Brazil commandeered the 1958 World Cup.

In the autumn of 1960, largely forgotten now, England followed suit. Walter Winterbottom persuaded his selection committee to give him the team he wanted with Wolves' Ron Flowers dropping from left-half to second centre-back, Bobby Robson and Johnny Haynes running midfield, with Jimmy Greaves up alongside the centre-forward.

For one season results were spectacular, with six successive victories including wins by 4-2 over Spain, 9-3 over Scotland and 8-0 over Mexico. Then came a quarter-final halt at the 1962 World Cup and the Ramsey takeover.

Ramsey had achieved success at Ipswich Town with a lop-sided tactic: an orthodox winger and deep-lying schemer, Jimmy Leadbetter, on the left.

In 1965 a combination of injuries prompted the selection of Ramsey's original "wingless wonders" in a 2-0 friendly victory for England against Spain in Madrid. From there it was only a small step to the wingless 4-4-2 with which he would win the World Cup a year later.

Alf Ramsey maybe gone but he should not be forgotten.

In charge... Alf Ramsey

WINNERS

GALATASARAY
Won away to Istanbul rivals Fenerbahce in the Turkish Super Liga for the first time in 20 years.

JORGE JESUS
Collected his fifth trophy in just eight months as Flamengo beat Independiente Del Valle to win the Recopa Sudamericana.

REAL SOCIEDAD
The Basque club reached the Final of the Spanish Cup for the first time since 1987.

AJAX
Knocked out of the Champions League in their last group game in December, the Dutch club's next appearance in Europe saw them eliminated from the Europa League by Getafe.

MICHEL PLATINI
The former UEFA president lost his appeal against his now-expired ban at the European Court of Human Rights.

SALZBURG
After selling Erling Haaland and Takumi Minamino in January, the Austrian champions went on a five-match winless streak.

LOSERS

Paul GARDNER

GLOBAL VIEW

Football's concussion problem: time to face the unthinkable

Powerful header...Jeff Astle (dark kit, centre) climbs above the QPR defence in the 1967 League Cup Final

There is no convincing reason that explains football's persistently casual attitude to its concussion problem and any complacency there might have been should have come to a screeching halt in 2002 – the year former West Bromwich Albion centre-forward Jeff Astle died.

Astle had been a powerful header of the ball and an inquest found he had suffered brain damage, with the coroner, Dr Andrew Haigh, defining it as an "industrial injury".

This was the moment for football to act, to let the world know it had heard Haigh's accusation and was doing all it could to ensure the safety of millions of players. But football – in this case the English FA – blew it. Faced with the possibility that one of its skills might be killing players it announced it would begin a 10-year survey of ex-players to establish, or rule out, the presence of brain damage.

In short, "more research" was needed, words that are widely understood to indicate a delaying tactic – such as used by the tobacco industry when trying to defend itself against the smoking-causes-cancer accusation. A 10-year wait for results, when immediate action was called for? What was needed, and what would have proved that head injuries were being taken seriously, was a critical review of the sport's rules to see if changes could be made to reduce the frequency of heading.

But football saw no need to investigate itself. The rules of the sport that had killed Astle were sacrosanct. There would be no changes.

Incredibly, after Haigh's warning, nothing was done by football for 10 years. It was not until 2012 that FIFA announced its "concussion protocol" – but got it wrong yet again. The protocol deals with the care of concussion sufferers; it does nothing to prevent concussions from happening.

Another five years went by before UEFA entered into the concussion fray. It was "seeking research proposals" to study the risk of heading among youth players. More research, but still no action. It also became clear that the strict requirements of the protocol were simply not being enforced.

Finally, in 2019, after the sport had wasted 17 years pussyfooting around the issue, came a flurry of action. It was caused by the publication of a study carried out in Scotland indicating that former professional players were three-and-a-half times as likely to die from dementia and other neurological diseases as non-players.

Suddenly, FIFA was said to be open to the idea of temporary substitutes, while English FA Chairman Greg Clarke went so far as to admit a "causal link" between football and dementia.

The Scottish FA now had the idea of limiting the amount of heading with a ban on heading for youngsters, aged from six to 11, in training. The English FA introduced similar regulations.

While a step in the right direction the restrictions do not go far enough

Danger...youngsters in a heading duel

as they do not apply to senior players and are limited to practice sessions. The game itself remains unaffected. Which really makes little sense.

While Europe had been dithering, the Americans made the decisive moves. Since 2016 they have totally banned heading for those below the age of 10 and in older youth games they allow temporary substitutes to play while a full protocol examination of a possibly concussed player is conducted.

Admittedly, it took a lawsuit to jolt the Americans into action, although this was almost a "friendly" lawsuit, brought by a group of parents. It did not seek money, but demanded that FIFA and other football bodies institute more stringent rules to protect players, particularly youngsters, from head injuries.

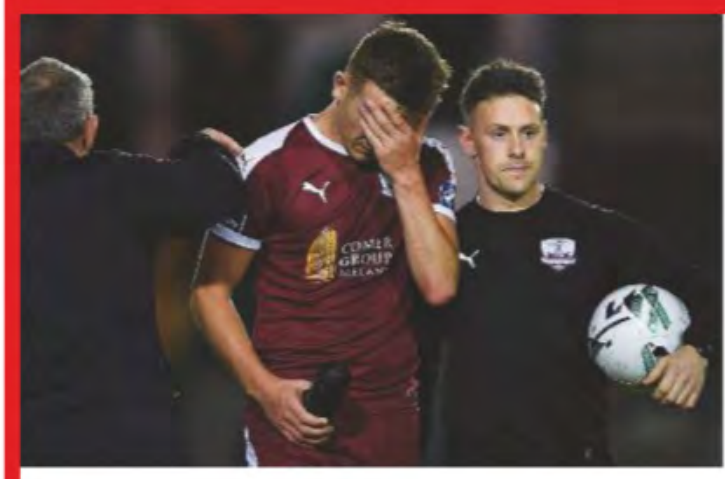
The threat of further – and much more damaging – legal action hangs ominously over the entire sport of football. A class-action suit brought by over 20,000 former grid iron players is expected to cost the NFL $1billion.

> The threat of further – and much more damaging – legal action hangs ominously over the entire sport of football

The stakes then are high. Football has had 18 years to make the sport safer by adjusting its rules. It could, for instance, ban long, high goal kicks that result in ugly heading duels. Or it could penalise goalkeepers who dive head first at the feet of opponents. But football has, so far, managed to delay any serious changes.

Justice delayed is justice denied. It is time, past time, for the sport to face the likelihood that some changes will be necessary in the way that football is played. The question must be faced: Is the concussion problem leading to a sport without heading? Most football people, I'm quite sure, regard that as simply unthinkable. They may be wrong.

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP



Blue...Killian Brouder is substituted

1 NINE BELOW ZERO

Shamrock Rovers defender Cole Omorehiomwan was kept in hospital with suspected frostbite following his side's game against Galway United in Dublin, after which nine visiting players were treated for hypothermia.

Freezing conditions caused by Storm Jorge also saw Galway's Killian Brouder substituted at half-time due to the effects the conditions were having on his body. Some of his team-mates were said to have been vomiting after the game in the Republic of Ireland's First Division ended 1-1.

The Galway team's doctor, Alan Byrne, said of Brouder: "He was as blue as anyone I have ever seen in my life."

2 AT HOME WITH THE PARENTS

Highland League side Fort William say their "ultras" are no longer welcome at Claggan Park unless they are "accompanied by a parent".

Chairman Peter Murphy made the decision following recent "unacceptable behaviour" from the youthful element of the club's support, known as the Yellow Order group.

Murphy said: "We have taken the decision to ban this group from home games. They will be able to gain entry individually if accompanied by a parent."

3 THAT'S GOTTA HURT...

A player from French amateur club AS Soetrich has been banned for five years after biting the penis of an opponent. The victim required 12 stitches and four days off work.

The incident took place in Terville, a town 200 miles east of Paris close to the border with Luxembourg, following a match between local side SC Terville and Soetrich.

A dispute between the opposing sides escalated after full-time, with a violent confrontation breaking out in the dressing rooms and then in the car park.

Both clubs were fined €200 each.

4 SUBBED AFTER 23 SECONDS

In Romania, CFR Cluj coach Dan Petrescu replaced 18-year-old Alin Fica after 23 seconds of a league match against Gaz Metan Medias. The youngster left the pitch without having touched the ball.

Clubs in the Romanian top flight are obliged to start league games with at least two under-21 homegrown players in their line-up and feature at least one for the entire match. This has prompted clubs to bend the rules by subbing a youngster in the first half, but not usually so quickly.

5 RONALDINHO'S FAKE NEWS

Former World Player of the Year Ronaldinho is facing a six-month spell in prison in Paraguay after he attempted to enter the country with a false passport.

The Brazilian was arrested at a hotel in the Paraguayan capital Asuncion alongside his brother, Roberto Assis, as they were preparing to take a flight back to his home in Rio de Janeiro.

Ronaldinho and Assis, who were questioned by police for six hours following their arrest, said they were in Paraguay for business reasons.

Arrested in Paraguay... Ronaldinho

"I write to inform that Eduardo will be absent this afternoon for historical cultural commitments as he goes with his father to watch a page being written into the history of Bergamo"

The mother of an Atalanta fan explains her child's absence from school due to a Champions League game

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Chance... Zvonimir Soldo

EUROPE

Barcelona signed striker **MARTIN BRAITHWAITE** from Leganes for €18m under a rule in La Liga that allows clubs to make new signings if a player is out injured for more than five months.

WALTER ZENGA replaced Rolando Maran as coach of Serie A side Cagliari.

Roma paid €11m to make Barcelona winger **CARLES PEREZ**'s loan move permanent, while also confirming the signing of Atalanta's **GIANLUCA MANCINI** and **JORDAN VERETOUT** from Fiorentina.

Borussia Dortmund activated a purchase option to sign **EMRE CAN** from Juventus for €25m.

Bundesliga strugglers Augsburg appointed **HEIKO HERRLICH** to replace Martin Schmidt.

Quick change... Ruben Amorim

Sporting swoop for Braga's Amorim

Sporting appointed **RUBEN AMORIM** as coach following the departure of Silas after a run of poor results that saw the side slip to fourth place in the Portuguese league.

Sporting paid €10million to release Amorim from his Braga contract, along with his assistants Adelio Candido and Carlos Fernandes. Amorim had replaced Sa Pinto as Braga boss in January.

Braga, in turn, promoted under-17 coach **CUSTODIO** to the position of first-team boss.

Permanent... Carles Perez

Ajax signed **ANTONY** from Sao Paulo for €15.5m, with the Brazilian winger joining the Dutch club in July.

Manchester City signed 17-year-old right-back **YAN COUTO** from Coritiba for an initial €6m plus a further €6m in instalments, which is a record deal for the Brazilian club.

Former Sevilla and Athletic Bilbao boss **JOAQUIN CAPARROS** was appointed coach of Armenia.

Liverpool's under-23s coach **NEIL CRITCHLEY**, who took charge of games against Aston Villa and Shrewsbury Town this season, was appointed manager of third-tier side Blackpool.

Former Croatia defender **ZVONIMIR SOLDO** was appointed head coach of Austrian Bundesliga side Admira Wacker, having most recently worked as right-hand man to Felix Magath in China with Shandong Luneng.

Former Denmark international **JON DAHL TOMASSON** took charge of Sweden's Malmo.

SOUTH AMERICA

JORGE SAMPAOLI, who led Argentina at the 2018 World Cup, was named coach of Brazil's Atletico Mineiro, replacing Rafael Dudamel who was sacked after just two months in charge.

CONCACAF

Ex-Valencia forward **MISTA** was named coach of Canadian Premier League debutants Atletico Ottawa, who are owned by Atletico Madrid.

AFRICA

Frenchman **PATRICE BEAUMELLE** replaced Ibrahim Kamara as Ivory Coast coach, while Algerian **BOUALEM MANKOUR** took charge of Mauritius.

Moroccan champions Wydad appointed **JUAN CARLOS GARRIDO** as coach, with the Spaniard replaced at Tunisian side Etoile du Sahel by **KAIS ZOUAGHI**.

ASIA

Ex-Tunisia coach **NABIL MAALOUL** took charge of Syria's national side.

Chinese side Wuhan Zall signed Sevilla defender **DANIEL CARRICO**.

Al Ahli Saudi replaced Christian Gross with **VLADAN MILOJEVIC**.

ABDUL-GHANI SHAHAD was named coach of Iraqi champions Al Shorta.

MANIZEH ZAINLI became the first female general-secretary of the Pakistan Football Federation.

Moving...Juan Carlos Garrido

"I'm not trying to offend, but you [white] people will never understand what goes through my mind in this moment. I am alone. I am totally alone. It's nice if people are speaking up but at the end of the day it just replays. Authority-wise I'm alone"

Chelsea defender Antonio Rudiger calls out the football authorities for their lack of action in tackling racism

Appointments, sackings and loans

Released... Daniel Sturridge

EUROPE

Former Barcelona midfielder **GABRI** was dismissed as coach of FC Andorra, the Spanish Segunda B side owned by former team-mate Gerard Pique.

DANIEL STURRIDGE had his contract with Turkish side Trabzonspor terminated and was banned for four months for breaching betting rules.

Sparta Prague forward **VACLAV KADLEC** announced his retirement as a player at the age of 27. He scored four goals in 15 games for his country and was a league winner twice.

CONCACAF

RON JANS resigned as coach of MLS side Cincinnati after he was alleged to have used a racial slur in front of players.

Allegations ...Ron Jans

OBITUARIES

Heroic...Harry Gregg

HARRY GREGG
(1932-2020)

The world's most-expensive goalkeeper when he joined Manchester United from Doncaster Rovers for £23,000 in 1957, he was hailed as a hero of the following year's Munich air disaster as he helped rescue team-mates and passengers after the plane crash which killed 23 people. Two weeks after the disaster he played in the FA Cup and kept a clean sheet against Sheffield Wednesday.

Capped 25 times by Northern Ireland, he went on to manage Shrewsbury Town, Swansea City, Crewe Alexandra and Carlisle United before retiring and running a hotel in his homeland.

He was awarded an OBE in the 2019 New Year's Honours.

ANTONIO DUMAS
(1955-2019)

Brazilian coach who courted controversy when he recruited players from his home country to play for Togo and Equatorial Guinea, persuading officials to give them instant passports to make them eligible to appear in World Cup qualifiers.

BARRY HULSHOFF
(1946-2020)

A member of the Ajax side that won three successive European Cups, from 1971 to 1973, the defender spent 11 years with the Amsterdam club, winning seven Eredivisie titles and 14 caps for his country. Became the first Dutch player to feature in an advertising campaign, promoting dog food on TV.

Champion...Barry Hulshoff won three successive European Cups with Ajax

eye witness

Steve Menary reports

CZECH REPUBLIC

Slavia tighten grip with Chinese money

Dominant domestically, European success is still a long way off for Czech champions

After 301 days, Bohemians achieved what no other club in the Czech league had done: they beat Slavia Prague.

The reigning Czech champions emerged from the midwinter break with 17 wins and three draws in the first half of the season. Buoyed by Chinese owners and led by coach Jindrich Trpisovsky, Slavia are too good for the rest of the Czech league. Or they were. Shorn of a host of influential players, Slavia struggled to overcome a dogged Bohemians side backed by the usual cacophony of smoke bombs and drums in their crumbling Dolicek stadium. After a goalmouth scramble, Jan Vodhanel stabbed home for a 1-0 win.

"We did what Barcelona could not and we scored at home against Slavia," laughs Martin Kurka, Bohemians' gregarious

On top...Slavia (in red) went into the winter break unbeaten domestically

supporter liaison officer.

Slavia only picked up two points in this season's Champions League – one of which was at Camp Nou – but along with city rivals Sparta they are the heartbeat of Czech football. The loss was double-edged for Trpisovsky, who grew up watching games at Dolicek with his Bohemians-supporting father.

Trpisovsky began coaching in his early 20s after injury ended his modest playing career. He spent nearly two decades in charge of teams in the lower leagues before getting his chance in 2013 with second-tier Viktoria Zizkov, where he made an immediate impact, winning 36 of 70 matches, before being handed the chance to coach in the top flight at Slovan Liberec two years later.

While at Zizkov, Trpisovsky had recruited young defensive midfielder Tomas Soucek on loan from Slavia. At Liberec, Trpisovsky again brought in Soucek on loan and the pair took the club into the Europa League group stage.

Slavia were watching and their Chinese owners Sinobo, who had bankrolled a first league championship in a decade in 2017 with older players, decided to change strategy.

> "Slavia's new owners changed everything in Czech football"
>
> **Tomas Carnogursky**

"Slavia came with their money and they took five players and our coach, even our press officer," sighs Tomas Carnogursky, general factotum at Slovan Liberec and now also the PR.

"Slavia's new owners changed everything in Czech football. In the past it was our strategy to buy talented players from Slavia and Sparta as they had enough older players and these young players could not get in the first XI.

"Then, after two or three years, they became better players and we sold them back. Now Sparta and Slavia have big squads and they loan out lots of players."

A couple of years ago Slavia were said to have 70 players on contract, with swathes sent out on loan and unable to play in games against their parent club.

The growth of loans also favours Slavia and Sparta in other ways. In their first game after the restart this season, Sparta – who are owned by Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky – entertained Slovan but were disjointed and squandered possession. The game's best player, Romania international Alexandru Baluta, created both goals for Tomas Malinsky in a 2-0 win – Slovan's first win at Sparta since 2012. Baluta is on loan from Slavia.

Last season Slavia's hard-running side knocked out Sevilla on a run to the Europa League quarter-finals and won

Upset...Bohemians (in green) ended Slavia's run

Passion...Sparta Prague (below) fans light up the stadium against Slovan Liberec

the domestic title. But that attracted plenty of attention from elsewhere and in the winter break Trpisovsky lost the heart of that side: captain Milan Skoda went to Turkey's Rizespor, defensive midfielder Alex Kral joined Spartak Moscow and Josef Husbauer signed on loan for Dinamo Dresden until the end of the season, when the deal should be made permanent.

However, the biggest loss was that of Soucek, who has a similar agreement with West Ham United. If that deal is finalised, the €20million price tag will beat the current domestic Czech transfer record paid by Borussia Dortmund for

Photo credit: Tomas Carnogursky/Slovan Liberec

Success...Slovan Liberec celebrate beating Sparta Prague

Movers & Shakers

JINDRICH TRPISOVSKY
In charge of champions Slavia, he is one of the most respected coaches in Eastern Europe.

MARTIN MALIK
Appointed FA president in December 2017 after Miroslav Pelta stepped down due to a corruption scandal that has still to come to court.

JAROSLAV SILHAVY
Played a record 465 Czech league games and was Slavia coach before taking the national team job in 2018.

TOMAS SOUCEK
Player of the season last term with Slavia and on loan for the rest of this season at West Ham.

PAVEL NEDVED
Juventus vice-chairman, he was instrumental in taking Ronaldo to Turin, but still remains in touch with the Czech game.

European regulars... Mlada Boleslav fans

Tomas Rosicky in 2001.

"I don't know what happens in the summer if West Ham go down," says a phlegmatic Trpisovsky. "It depends a lot on how he plays.

"If he plays like the first game, there will be interest from better clubs. I believe he will have a lot of offers."

Trpisovsky has the cushion of a big lead at the top of the table but must now rebuild in the second half of the season.

"We lost a lot of tall players," says former Slavia centre-back Jiri Bilek. "We can be quick and make a pressing game but now we are a small team."

Bilek played for Kaiserslautern in Germany and Poland's Zaglebie Lubin before returning to finish his career at Slavia. Having retired as a player in 2017 and now in charge of the club's youth set-up, he has no doubt the popular Trpisovsky – who wears a trademark white baseball hat and watches games with his hands plunged into tracksuit bottoms – is up to the task.

"Trpisovsky knows how he wants to play and the type of players that he wants," says Bilek. "I have never seen a coach with his style before. He is always three steps ahead.

"I played for 20 years and never had a coach like him. The atmosphere is very different. He's like a friend but he also knows when to be the boss."

Slavia's owners will want a Champions League return next season but, with only six qualifying places available, the top of Europe's footballing pyramid is slipping into the distance.

Bilek continues: "The rest of the world will run away and we can't catch them. We can be successful but just in our world. We wanted to keep Soucek but we have to sell him because of the financial side.

"Our place, if we are realistic, is the Europa League. Of course we can dream of the Champions League, but the rules have changed."

> "I have never seen a coach with his style before. He's three steps ahead"
>
> **Jiri Bilek on Slavia coach Jindrich Trpisovsky**

UEFA is creating a third European competition – and one that Czech clubs could win – but there appears to be little appetite for such a competition.

"It will be split regionally and no one will be interested. It will end up like the Intertoto Cup," says Stepan Hanus, head of PR and communications at the Czech Football League.

As Europe's top clubs motor off with more UEFA money, the Czech league struggles to play catch-up.

"Just to break even in Czech football you need to play in Europe or you lose money," shrugs Bohemians director Darek Jakubowicz, whose family own 51 per cent of the club. "You need a strong owner."

Bohemians get by on a budget of €3.5m, while Slavia's is around €50m. At present TV money is shared equally but the clubs are discussing whether to change the existing arrangement of seven matches a week on pay TV and one on free-to-air. However, even tweaking a deal that runs to 2035 will not generate enough money and the league are looking at other ways of raising income.

"There are three options," explains Hanus. "The clubs can find another TV market for the league or we can decrease the number of professional clubs. Everyone that talks about Czech football knows that 32 clubs [in the top two tiers] is already too many.

"The other option is to make a new market with another country like Slovakia or Slovenia."

The Czech Republic split harmoniously from Slovakia in 1993 and there is appetite for recombining the leagues in Bratislava, although not in Prague.

Another option is esports. Czech clubs have not been on FIFA's eponymous game since 2011 after the federation asked owners EA Sport for too much money. Four sides – Bohemians, Sparta, Plzen and Teplice – have esports arms and the league is pushing to get back

League clash... Pribram (in green) and Banik Ostrava

on the platform.

Like the TV rights, any increase in money would be shared equally – a move which 31 of 32 clubs support.

"Slavia disagree with the model a bit," says Hanus. "They are a modern club and speak to clubs in Belgium, the Netherlands and the Champions League. I can see their point of view but they are the only ones."

Slavia are looking to compete with the rest of Europe just as UEFA appears to be pulling up the drawbridge to protect the elite. "This is the most important discussion," adds Hanus.

For Trpisovsky, any conversations used to be in Czech, which made him less attractive to overseas suitors, but the most feted Czech coach of the modern era has begun learning English.

If he succeeds in rebuilding Slavia and making inroads into Europe again next term, his players will not be the only ones attracting overseas interest. WS

FIRST LEAGUE: 2019-20

BANIK OSTRAVA
League winners in 2004, they were bought by Czech millionaire Vaclav Brabec in 2016 after relegation. They returned to the top flight a year later and finished fifth last season.

BOHEMIANS 1905
Formed as AFK Vrsovice and league winners in 1983. The only Czech club where the supporters hold a stake, a move that came about following a financial crisis in 2005.

DYNAMO CESKE BUDEJOVICE
Returned to the top flight this season as second-tier champions. Their chairman is Karel Poborsky, who started his career at the club.

FASTAV ZLIN
Moravian club who qualified for the Europa League group stage in 2017-18 and celebrated their centenary last year.

JABLONEC
In the top flight since the 1993-94 season, they have won the domestic cup twice and were fourth in the league last time out. They are owned by former national federation president Miroslav Pelta.

KARVINA
Formed from a merger in 2003 and owned by a state-controlled company.

MLADA BOLESLAV
The city council owns 34 per cent and car manufacturer Skoda provide funding. Regular European competitors but only seventh in the league last season.

OPAVA
Founded in 1907 and owned by the city council. No major success apart from a 2017 Cup Final appearance.

PRIBRAM
The legal successors to former European Cup semi-finalists Dukla Prague but they have few fans.

SIGMA OLOMOUC
Cup winners in 2012, they went down in 2014 but bounced back and were in the Europa League last season.

SLAVIA PRAGUE
The only foreign-owned club, they are controlled by Chinese company Sinobo. Winner of 19 league titles.

SLOVACKO
Formed from a merger in 2000 between FC Synot and FC Slovacka Slavia. Twice cup finalists.

SLOVAN LIBEREC
Three-time title winners, they have reached the Europa League group stage three times in the last six years.

SPARTA PRAGUE
Founded in 1893 and winners of a record 36 domestic titles. Finished third in the league last season.

TEPLICE
Cup winners in 2003 and 2009, they qualified for the Champions League as league runners-up in 1999.

VIKTORIA PLZEN
Won their first league title in 2011 and have added four more since.

Heated...tempers boil over in the Slavia-Sparta derby in Prague

Peterjon Cresswell reports

HUNGARY

The minnows of Mezokovesd eye Europa League

An impressive campaign could see newcomers enter continental competition for the first time

While Europe's elite challenge for a place at the top table of the Champions League, the Europa League remains the holy grail for smaller clubs and the fallen giants of domestic leagues further down the food chain. This year's Final will be staged in Gdansk, with the showpiece having previously gone to Baku, Bucharest and Warsaw.

In 2022 Budapest will join that list, but before then there is a far more obscure town in Hungary's north east hoping to be involved in the competition.

With recent wins against Debrecen and champions-elect Ferencvaros, Mezokovesd – who are based near the famous wine destination of Eger in the town of the same name – are a team very much in line for a berth in next season's Europa League.

Having only reached the Hungarian top flight for the first time in 2014, Mezokovesd have been relegated twice since but are currently enjoying a third consecutive season of rubbing shoulders with the big boys.

The club's general manager, Jozsef Hagyacki, takes up the story, explaining: "Local chess, handball, boxing and other sports clubs from the 1950s joined together in 1975.

"This was pared back to the more football-focused Mezokovesd Sports Association in 1990, then ▸

Holding their own... Budu Zivzivadze of Mezokovesd keeps Honved's Bence Batik at bay

fused with the popular nearby Zsory Thermal Baths in 2012."

It was around this time that the town's mayor Zoltan Fekete, who is from the same ruling party as the country's relentless stadium-building prime minister Viktor Orban, began to invest in a high-level infrastructure.

"The right conditions are vital," continues Hagyacki. "We installed a heated pitch and the new stadium was completed in 2016.

"In addition, a modern training centre will be built, with three pitches, a smaller training area and a hotel, where we can welcome foreign teams for training camps. We also have a supply centre for athletes with artificial turf and another grass pitch."

> "We are absolutely not dealing with the possibility of playing in Europe"
> **Attila Kuttor**

Mezokovesd's sponsor-free Town Stadium has the capacity to hold one third of the town's entire 16,000 population, but it is in the dugout where the real transformation lies.

A journeyman defender, Attila Kuttor played for 12 clubs before taking up coaching duties at Szombathely Haladas. Although "Hali" are now going through a tough time and were relegated to the second tier last season, two stalwart Hungarian internationals, Bela Illes and tracksuit-bottomed goalkeeper Gabor Kiraly, could not have provided Kuttor with a better club at which to learn his trade.

Of his move to Mezokovesd, Kuttor says: "When I got here in 2017 the team was fighting to avoid relegation so the only goal was to stay up. Of course, we were constantly working to get the team in line with my ideas and we started doing that when I arrived. I think it was successful because we were still in the top flight NBI at the end of the year."

With Kuttor came a journeyman who was little-known outside a few lower-league provincial clubs. Yet Tamas Cseri has, at the age of 32, been a revelation this season.

"He is the captain of the team and an exemplary footballer who has been the decisive link in the game as we planned it," says Kuttor. "He has a lot of positive qualities that I couldn't begin to list, but the point is he plays a crucial role in the team and in this kind of football."

It was Cseri's industrious passing game that put Ferencvaros to the sword this term, scoring one goal and being involved in just about everything else. In front of a sell-out crowd at the Town Stadium, he showed what you can do with some clever coaching backed up by the right infrastructure.

Kuttor says he is "absolutely not dealing with the possibility of playing in Europe", explaining: "We want to constantly improve and advance as far as the team is concerned.

"We only focus on the next task, the match ahead."

General manager Hagyacki, however, takes a slightly different view, revealing: "I don't want to look back, I really hope we can keep this position.

"We are secretly talking about the possibility of the Europa League..." WS

Exemplary...Tamas Cseri (left)

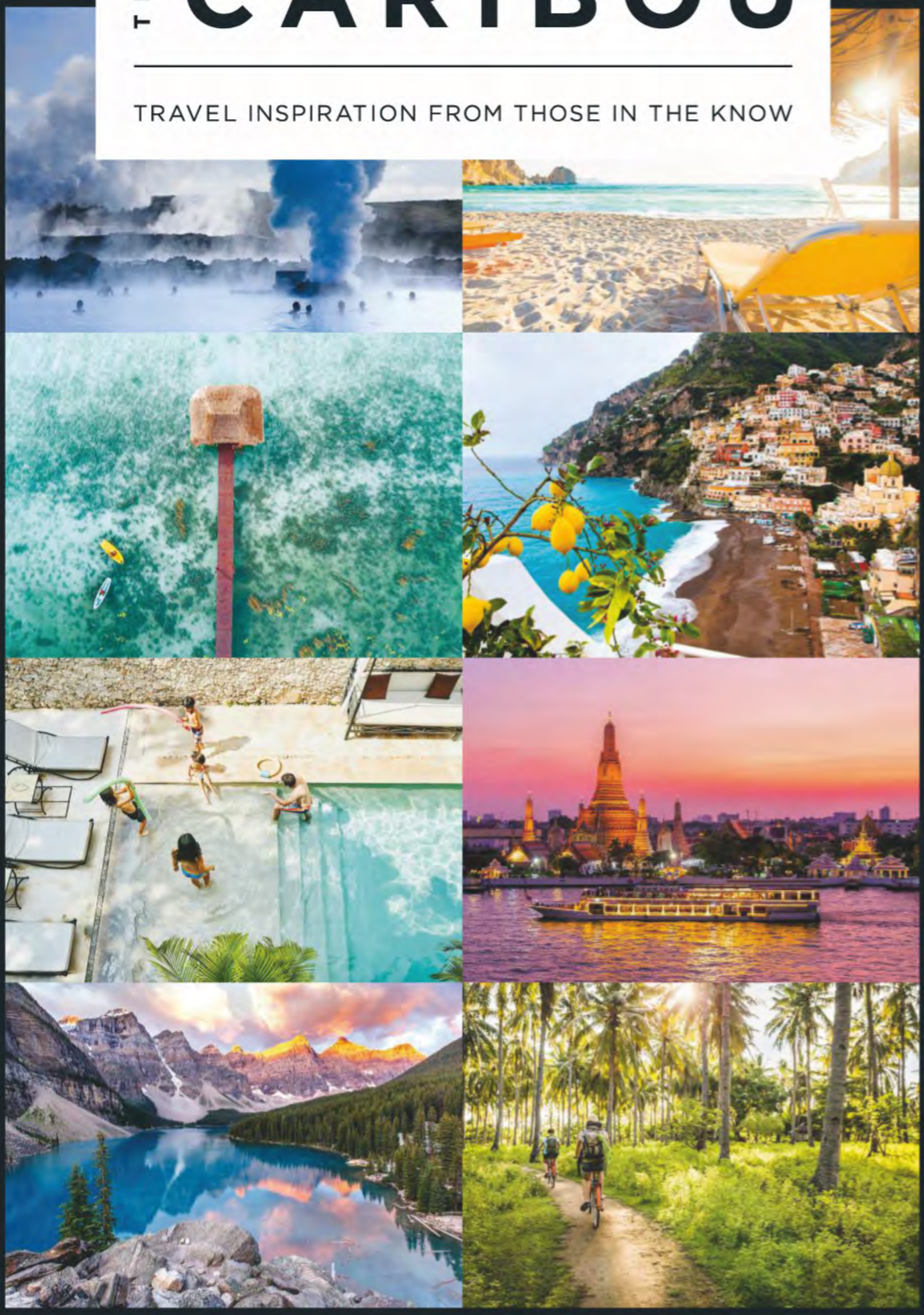
> "We are secretly talking about the possibility of the Europa League"
> **Jozsef Hagyacki**

In charge...coach Attila Kuttor

Name game... the Town stadium

THE CARIBOU

TRAVEL INSPIRATION FROM THOSE IN THE KNOW



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Ciro Immobile

Lazio striker in the form of his life at 30

When he was officially presented as a Lazio player in 2016, Ciro Immobile was asked how he thought he compared with previous strikers at the club.

Modestly, he said he had seen footage of players such as Beppe Signori and Bruno Giordano but, for the time being, he would not like to draw comparisons with them, adding: "Maybe if you ask me the same question in two or three years time I might give you an answer."

Well, four years have now gone by and the comparisons are hard to avoid. With 27 goals by March for league leaders Lazio, the 30-year-old is not only the leading marksman in Serie A this season he also ranks at number four in Lazio's all-time scoring chart behind Silvio Piola, Signori and Giorgio Chinaglia.

Further afield he also leads the ESM Golden Shoe standings, ahead of Robert Lewandowski, Erling Haaland, Cristiano Ronaldo and Timo Werner (see page 75).

The point about Immobile's reticence on that first afternoon is that it was a reflection on the two disappointing years that had gone before, first with Borussia Dortmund and then Sevilla.

In 2014, having just topped the Serie A scoring chart with 22 goals for Torino, he joined a Dortmund side coached by Jurgen Klopp. The German experience, however, did not work out. By the end of a season in which he saw too much time on the bench, he had scored 10 goals, with just three of those coming in the Bundesliga. He left with the conclusion that German was "damn hard to learn" and headed to Spain.

To some extent things were even worse at Sevilla, where he scored just four times, and by January 2016 he was back at Torino, where he rediscovered his touch and found the net 14 times before the end of the season.

That earned him a €9.5million move to Lazio in the summer. One hundred and sixteen goals in the following three-and-a-half seasons and Lazio would now probably put a €70m price tag on him.

To put it mildly, the Lazio experience has put Immobile's faltering career back

Sharp finish...beating Internazionale keeper Daniele Padelli

on track. And if he goes on to win the title of "*Capocannoniere*" this season, it will be the second time he has done it with Lazio, having ended up joint-top scorer with Internazionale's Mauro Icardi on 29 goals in the 2017-18 campaign.

One man who has not been surprised by Immobile's good form with Lazio is his former coach at Serie B side Pescara, Zdenek Zeman.

Playing alongside Lorenzo Insigne (now at Napoli) and Marco Verratti (now at Paris Saint-Germain), Immobile scored 28 goals and topped the second-tier chart in the 2011-12 season. Looking at the current Immobile, Zeman recently told *La Gazzetta dello Sport*: "When he came to me it was after a couple of seasons when he hadn't scored much.

"But he was a worker, a player who really wanted to train and push himself, and he did that and he started scoring goals immediately. He is a better striker now than he was with me. He sees the goal much better.

"Whereas in the past he would blast it high into the terraces, he now shoots only when he thinks he will score."

> "In the past he would blast it high into the terraces. He now shoots only when he thinks he will score"
> **Former Lazio coach Zdenek Zeman**

Europe's best...ESM Golden Shoe leader

Zeman's observations are a reflection of the fact that Immobile is nothing if not a player whose best qualities are his physical power and presence rather than a refined technique. He is in fact very handy with his feet but he is also much admired for his work rate and his willingness to put himself about, in attack and defence.

Obviously, Zeman is too subtle to suggest that Immobile could yet inspire Lazio to a title win. But he does acknowledge that, along with midfielders, Luis Alberto and Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, he is fundamental to the side's title challenge.

When he returned to Italy at the age of 26, Immobile had said that he hoped to do well because the best years for a striker were between "26 and 30 years of age". If he has managed to resurrect his career in those years at Lazio then he is the first to admit that he owes much to Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi, a coach "who put me right in the heart of his plans".

His good seasons with Lazio have meant the boy from Torre Annunziata, Naples, has consolidated his position in the Italian national squad.

Given his first cap in a 1-0 friendly loss to Spain in 2014, he has now won 39 caps, scoring 10 goals, under four different coaches: Cesare Prandelli, Antonio Conte, Gian Piero Ventura and Roberto Mancini. Barring injury he looks a certainty for the Euro 2020 squad and Mancini will doubtlessly hope that he continues in his rich goalscoring vein.

In truth, Immobile has not always sparkled for Italy. In the 1-0 loss to Uruguay in the 2014 World Cup and the World Cup play-off loss to Sweden in 2017 he was less than inspired. Then again, he was not the only one.

At Euro 2020 this summer Italians will be hoping he can sustain his current match-winning form. In the meantime, Lazio fans will settle for more of the same in Serie A.

Paddy Agnew

Unstoppable...on target yet again, this time against Sampdoria from the penalty spot

Christopher Nkunku

Ex-PSG midfielder firing up Leipzig's title challenge

A migratory flight across the Rhine last summer has worked wonders for the former Paris Saint-Germain attacking midfielder, who recently underlined his importance to German title-chasers RB Leipzig with an incredible four assists in a 5-0 victory away at Schalke.

The 22-year-old Nkunku, who was on PSG's books for almost a decade, rarely went beyond the role of first-team makeweight at Parc des Princes, only being deployed when bigger names were injured, suspended or rested.

But how his fortunes have improved since joining Leipzig in a €15million deal; starting regularly in the Bundesliga and Champions League and catching the eye with his dynamism and creativity. By late February he had set up no fewer than 13 goals in the league, which put him third in the Bundesliga assists chart behind Jadon Sancho of Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich's Thomas Muller.

"I wouldn't say it was easy for me to leave PSG," he told *Kicker* magazine. "But I had to go for the sake of my development. I wasn't playing enough in Paris. I made the right decision.

"The package here in Leipzig is perfect: the structures, the philosophy, the sporting objectives, the opportunities which young players have to grow at this club. Some opposing teams in Germany will just sit back and defend. However, most teams want to get on the front foot.

Creative...only Sancho and Muller had more assists

"What especially surprised me was the intensity here. You have a lot of sprints to make, particularly after losing possession. Together with the physicality of the game that makes the Bundesliga really tough."

Word of his exploits in Germany has filtered back to France, where there is a growing call for a first call-up to the national squad.

France coach Didier Deschamps, who is a conservative by instinct, has rarely been one to embrace experimentation,

> "I wouldn't say it was easy for me to leave PSG, but I had to go for the sake of my development"

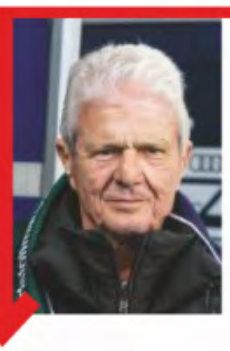
but he might just be tempted to take a chance on Nkunku.

Born and raised in Paris by Congolese parents, the youngster can play out wide on either flank and is equally comfortable as a second striker or a number 10. Such versatility screams Euro 2020 wild card.

Julian Nagelsmann must take a lot of the credit for the player's explosion. Initially the Leipzig coach found the Frenchman a little too timid for his own good and was concerned that his new signing reserved his best performances for the training ground, often going into his shell on matchdays.

Nagelsmann made it clear he wanted him to accept more responsibility. Message received, understood and acted upon.

Nick Bidwell



Dietmar Hopp

Fans vent anger at Hoffenheim owner

Hoffenheim benefactor Dietmar Hopp has vowed to keep attending games despite visiting Bayern Munich fans targetting him with abusive banners during a chaotic Bundesliga fixture at the Rhein-Neckar-Arena, which Bayern comfortably won 6-0.

For many German football fans, Hopp and Hoffenheim simply embody everything they detest in the modern game: a "plastic club" without tradition, a one-man-band form of ownership.

The reason stems from Hoffenheim being granted exemption, in 2015, from the member-majority rules governing the structure of professional clubs in Germany. But Hopp insists he will not be cowed, declaring: "Why shouldn't I go to the stadium? The people who do this are the ones who should stay away.

"If I knew what these idiots wanted from me, it would be all the easier for me to understand."

In chaotic scenes which did little for the image of German football, referee Christian Dingert twice had to suspend play late in the second half, implementing the domestic federation's three-step protocol for dealing with offensive banners or racism.

Bayern officials, players and coach Hansi Flick pleaded with their supporters to tone down the antics, but when play resumed, 13 minutes of non-combatant action ensued, with players merely passing the ball among themselves.

Hoffenheim skipper Benjamin Hubner later told *Bild* newspaper that the two squads collectively agreed to call a truce as a way of protesting against the fans' behaviour. "We didn't want to allow the match to be abandoned," he said. "We were trying to give a sign."

At the final whistle, players and representatives from both clubs made a point of standing together and saluting the home fans. Tellingly, Bayern's players made no attempt to interact with their own supporters.

Bayern chief executive Karl-Heinz Rummenigge was especially damning, saying: "This has been a dark day for football. I must clearly and unequivocally say that I'm ashamed of what happened in the away end.

"We have had everything filmed and will take action with all our might against those who have discredited our club."

It is thought two Bayern fan groups, Red Fanatic and Schickeria, were to blame, but to what extent Rummenigge will go to war against them is unknown

Of course, the anti-Hopp brigade is not confined to Bayern. Borussia Dortmund, Borussia Monchengladbach, Cologne and Union Berlin fans have all made similar feelings known.

In the stands, hate is definitely winning at the moment.

Nick Bidwell

Support...with Bayern's Karl-Heinz Rummenigge (right)

Martin Braithwaite

Striker joins Barcelona in shock transfer

If there was a prize awarded for the most surprising transfer of 2020, Martin Braithwaite would already be on the winner's podium, celebrating a hands-down victory. Not only did he leave Liga strugglers Leganes for defending champions Barcelona, he made the move outside of the regular window after Barca were granted special dispensation to sign a forward following a season-ending injury to French starlet Ousmane Dembele.

And so it was that a striker who struggled to establish himself during two seasons with Middlesbrough found himself playing in the *Clasico* against Real Madrid in March after a campaign spent battling against relegation.

"It was a surprise, but at the same time not so much because I have always had the ambition to play at this level," Braithwaite said during his presentation at Camp Nou.

"I am a strong player, fast, physical. My main characteristic is that I like to study the play. Barcelona play the best football in the world. I have spent the last two days studying the way they play and I will keep doing it."

As Barcelona coach Quique Setien quite simply put it: "He fits our needs."

A combination of injuries, bad luck and poor transfer policy had left Barca short of firepower. Abel Ruiz and Carles Perez were moved on, to Braga and Roma respectively, during the January transfer window, despite the club being told in early January that Luis Suarez would be sidelined for up to four months with a knee injury.

On target...scoring for Leganes against Mallorca

But Dembele's injury – he is out for six months after tearing a hamstring in training in early February – opened up a possible loophole. Under new Liga regulations, clubs are permitted to sign an emergency replacement for any player injured outside of the window.

With the transfer window closed, Leganes' energies were focused on their fight to stay in the top flight, but they were powerless to prevent Barca paying the €20million release clause for a player who had been their record signing at €5m last summer.

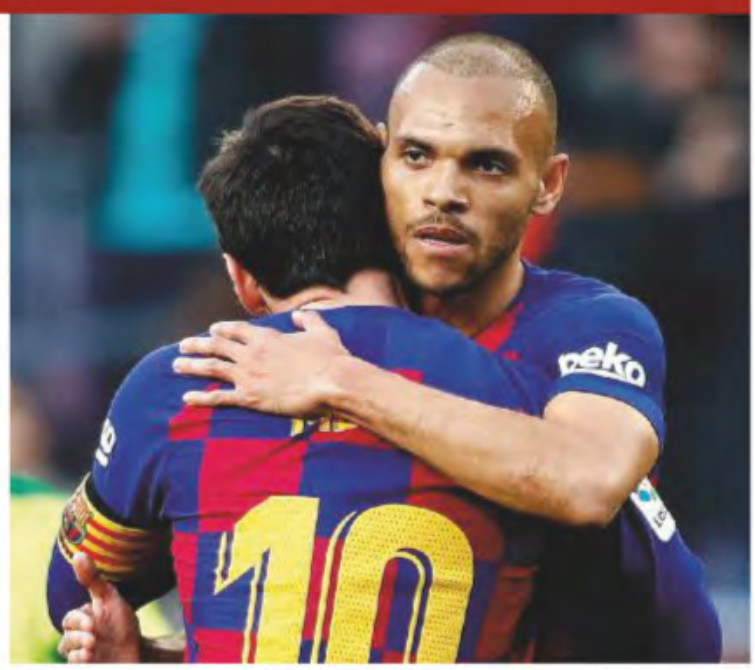
The double whammy for Leganes was that not only would they be losing their top scorer, under Liga rules they were also unable to sign a replacement. Braithwaite's six league goals this season had given them hope of avoiding the drop and they had already also lost another striker, with Youssef En-Nesyri joining Sevilla in January.

Barcelona had considered an approach for Getafe's Angel Rodriguez who, at between €6m and €8m, was a cheaper option. However, at 32 he is also four years older than Braithwaite who, despite being seen as a short-term fix, signed a four-and-a-half year contract.

Signed too late to play in the Champions League, and with Barca out of the Copa del Rey, the Denmark international would only be available for the remaining 14 Liga games this season.

Although the expectation is that he will feature mostly as a substitute, the transfer represented a major upturn in fortunes for a player who struggled to fit in at Middlesbrough under successive managers Garry Monk and Tony Pulis. Loaned out to French side Bordeaux and then Leganes, the former Toulouse man performed well enough in La Liga

> "It was a surprise, but at the same time not so much because I have always had the ambition to play at this level"



Team-mate...he will now line up alongside stars such as Lionel Messi

Clever...Barca's coaching staff have been impressed by the Dane

to persuade Leganes to make the deal permanent in July.

Born in Esbjerg to a Danish mother and Guyanese father, Braithwaite enjoyed an impressive autumn for both club and country, with his goals in the Euro 2020 qualifiers against Gibraltar and Republic of Ireland shoring up his chances of inclusion in the Danish squad for the Euro finals.

An eloquent interviewee who began donating £1,000 to charity for every goal scored while with Toulouse, he has so far taken the move to Barcelona in his stride. His appeal to Setien and the Barca coaching staff is that he is a clever player who belies the image as a target man and is able to run the channels and track back from wide positions.

Braithwaite almost had a dramatic impact in the *Clasico* at the Bernabeu in March when he appeared as a substitute midway through the second half. Shortly before Real Madrid took the lead through Brazilian teenager Vinicius Junior, he broke clear on the right-hand side of Madrid's penalty area, only for keeper Thibaut Courtois to snaffle his shot.

In the end Madrid, having neutralised Lionel Messi, ran out 2-0 winners thanks to a late, second goal from Mariano Diaz and leapfrogged Barcelona at the top of the league.

There will, however, doubtless be further opportunities in a Barca shirt.

And after such a surprising turn of events, don't bet against Martin Braithwaite having the last laugh.

John Holmesdale

Amr Fahmy

Whistle-blower's death shines light on Africa's problems

The death, from an aggressive brain tumour, of former CAF general secretary Amr Fahmy has brought renewed focus to the fact his whistle-blowing on corruption in the African game has yet to be dealt with by FIFA.

It includes long-standing allegations of corruption against CAF president Ahmad and a more recent audit of the confederation's finances which show dubious spending of millions of dollars.

Fahmy, 36, was already being treated for the disease when he was at CAF and reported Ahmad to FIFA's ethics commission for alleged fraud and corruption. A body of documents detailing false expenses, profligate spending and a dirty-looking deal with a French company belonging to a close friend of Ahmad were sent to FIFA, as well as being widely leaked.

While FIFA's supposedly independent ethics committee acknowledged it was investigating the allegations, it is now almost 18 months since they were handed the damning evidence, yet Ahmad remains in control of the African game.

> "He was hardly capable of replying to a letter"
> **A CAF official on Mouad Hajji**

Fahmy lost his job in April last year because of his whistle-blowing, summarily fired during a meeting of the executive committee. He had already taken several months off trying to fight the disease and when *World Soccer* met him in Paris in November he was still being treated but hopeful of recovery.

In December he made a low-key announcement that he would challenge Ahmad for the CAF presidency but he died two months after that.

It was FIFA president Gianni Infantino who had encouraged him to submit the documents to the ethics committee, he said. But the fact that the committee has sat on the evidence since November 2018 has led to the conclusion that it has been politically prudent for Infantino to tell them to hold off on any action and keep Ahmad in place

But that might not be for long now after a fall out in January when Ahmad refused to allow FIFA general secretary Fatma Samoura to extend her six-month tenure cleaning up CAF's tawdry affairs.

That has left Ahmad vulnerable to FIFA finally taking action against him and many of his cohorts.

The leaking of the audit report that FIFA had ordered of CAF's books revealed a damning culture of African football leaders using the organisation as a cash-clearing house and highlighted several blatant misuses of money.

The executive summary, which ran to 55 pages, highlighted "there was no proper accounting for 2015" and that "for 2019, there was no accounting between January and June".

Whistle-blower... Fahmy at a CAF conference

Fahmy's successor as general secretary was Mouad Hajji, a dentist by profession who had worked in the sports ministry in his home country of Morocco and was recommended by Fouzi Lekjaa, the CAF vice-president who is seen by many as having a powerful hold over Ahmad.

Hajji quit in February, citing personal reasons, but more likely, as one senior official told *World Soccer*, he was "jumping off a sinking ship".

Hajji had quickly gained a reputation for tardiness and was the subject of frequent complaints from member associations. "He was hardly capable of

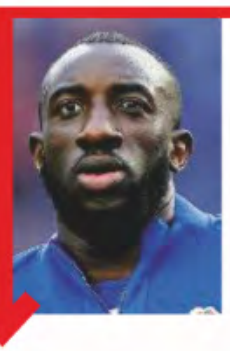
replying to a letter," said another official.

Ahmad appointed Abdel Bah – who until two years ago was a junior executive with the French marketing company, Lagardere – as Hajji's temporary replacement, although Bah plans to quit Cairo in April and go back to Paris.

It is Infantino who holds the cards and he is now seemingly searching for a credible alternative to Ahmad to present to the CAF electorate for next year's elections.

Once found, it is inevitable given the reliance on FIFA money by almost all the continent's associations that whoever Infantino endorses will be elected.

Mark Gleeson



Moussa Marega

Racist abuse sees striker clash with team-mates

Just when it looked as if progress was being made in tackling racism in the game, the case of Porto's Malian striker Moussa Marega brought European football crashing back to reality.

Marega walked off midway through his side's Portuguese league win at Vitoria Guimaraes, protesting that he had been subjected to racist abuse from the home side's supporters. He began to head towards the dugouts in the 69th minute, nine minutes after scoring what would prove to be the winner in a 2-1 victory that closed the gap on leaders Benfica.

Marega had celebrated his goal by pointing to his skin in response to a section of fans who had been targetting him. To make matters worse, he was shown a yellow card for his reaction.

As he tried to leave the pitch he pointed his thumbs down and also raised his middle fingers to the crowd.

Team-mates Alex Telles, Sergio Oliveira and Ivan Marcano were among those who tried to stop Marega leaving the pitch, grabbing him around the waist as the arguments ensued for a number of minutes.

Porto coach Sergio Conceicao was eventually forced to substitute Marega in the 72nd minute.

Afterwards, in an Instagram post, Marega said: "I would just like to tell these idiots who come to the stadium to make racist chants, go f*** yourself. I hope I never see you on a football field again. You are a disgrace!

"And I also thank the referees for not defending me and for giving me a yellow card because I defend my skin colour."

Conceicao said: "We are completely indignant. We are a family regardless of nationality, skin colour, hair colour. We are human, we deserve respect. What happened here is unfortunate.

"We are completely indignant about what happened. I know the passion that exists for Vitoria and I think most of the fans do not see themselves in the same attitude of some people who have insulted Moussa since the warm-up."

The Portuguese Football Federation denied that a fine of just over €700 handed to Vitoria Guimaraes was for racist chants directed at Marega. News of the small fine sparked outrage on social media, with Marega commenting sarcastically, again on Instagram: "Oh no, that's a lot! Can I pay it for them Portuguese league?"

It was Marega's successful loan spell at Guimaraes in 2016-17, when he scored 15 goals in 25 games, that convinced Porto to persevere with a player who had joined them from Maritimo in January 2016 but struggled to adapt to life at a major club.

Following his loan spell at Guimaraes, Marega returned to Porto and has since become a key figure under Conceicao.

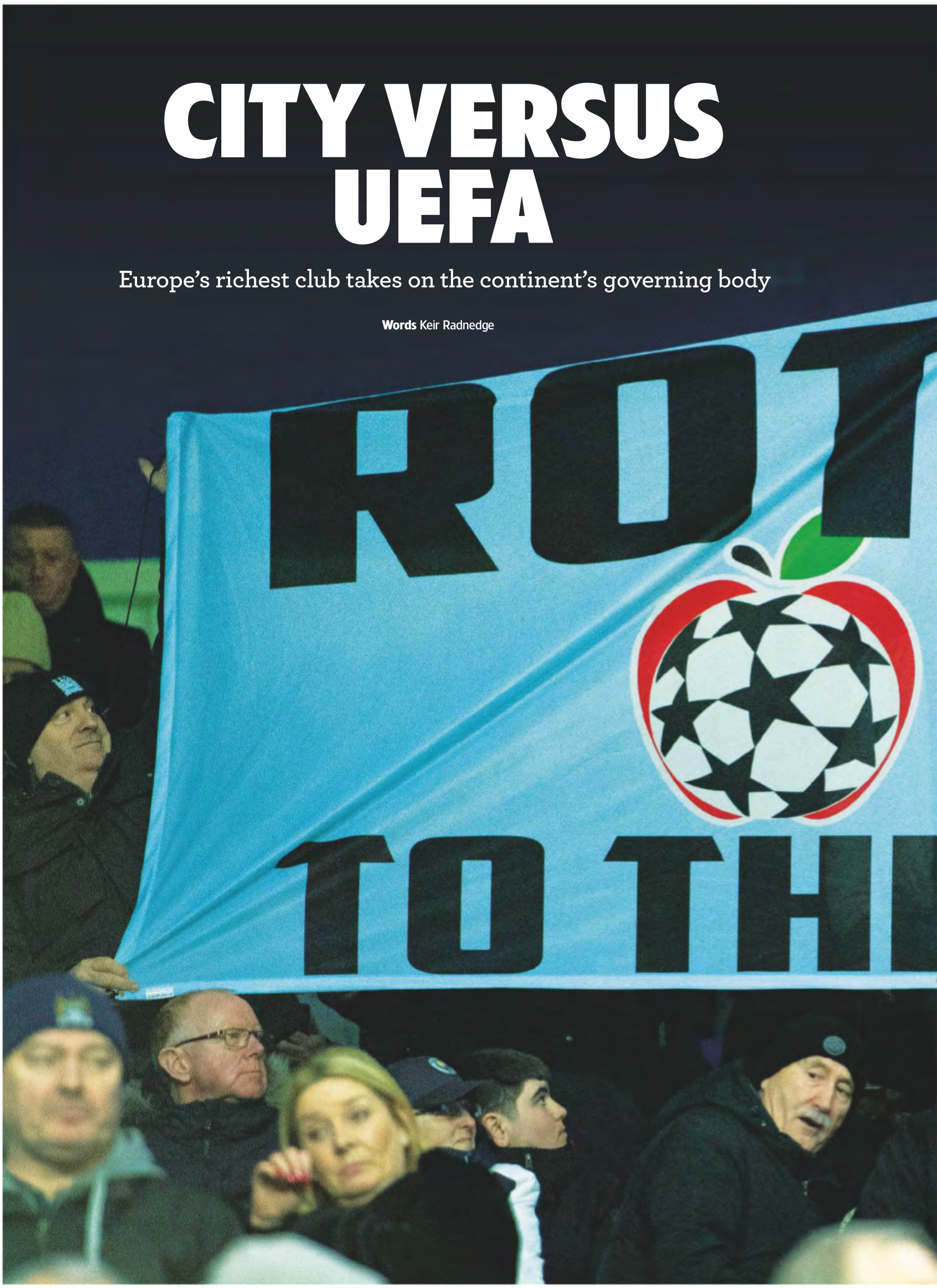
John Holmesdale

Enough...Sergio Oliveira tries to stop his team-mate from leaving the pitch

CITY VERSUS UEFA

Europe's richest club takes on the continent's governing body

Words Keir Radnedge



UEFA dare not lose its financial fairplay case against Manchester City. Europe's governing body has already lost one FFP case against a mega-rich, state-aided club – the Qatari-owned Paris Saint-Germain – on a technicality. A second such failure against Abu Dhabi-owned City would undermine the regulatory power it claims over the European game.

And such a blow against UEFA's authority would encourage critics who believe the old models of sporting association to be outdated and irrelevant in the modern, new-tech era.

An obvious first development would be a renewed pursuit by the elite clubs of that long-envisioned super league to usurp the primacy of the UEFA Champions League from which the governing body rakes in billions.

The independent adjudicatory chamber of UEFA's Club Financial Control Body (CFCB) say City have broken the FFP rules by "overstating its sponsorship revenue in its accounts and in the break-even information submitted ▸

to UEFA between 2012 and 2016", adding that the club "failed to co-operate in the investigation". Hence the two-season ban from European club competition and €30million fine.

The fine is small change for City, but any suspension will affect status, TV revenues and sponsorship income – neighbours United have already seen their finances take a hit from European absence – so how did it come to this?

An investigation was launched after German newspaper *Der Spiegel* published leaked documents in November 2018 alleging City had inflated the value of a sponsorship deal to mislead UEFA over compliance with FFP rules regarding independent revenue sources and requiring clubs to break even.

The source of the leaks was a Portuguese computer wiz named

Leaks...Rui Pinto

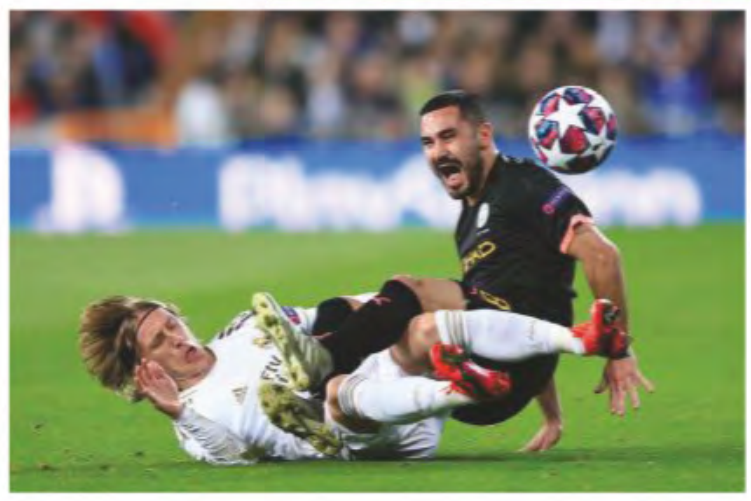
> "They are laughing at the system. It is not just about PSG but also Manchester City...this is damaging football"
>
> **Javier Tebas, president of the Spanish league, on Gulf-state investment**

Rui Pinto, who has been extradited home from Hungary and is now in prison awaiting trial on more than 90 charges. These concern domestic hacking offences – which have in turn prompted tax and fraud-squad raids on Portugal's top clubs and agents.

City have history with UEFA and were fined in 2014 for a previous breach of regulations. The latest punishment prompted speculation about the continuance of manager Pep Guardiola, who is contracted until the summer of next year, and superstar players such as Kevin De Bruyne.

In February, City had an appeal registered by the Court of Arbitration for Sport, with the club's chief executive, Ferran Soriano, saying the breaches are "simply not true". CAS, meanwhile, has commented that "it is not possible" to say when the matter will be resolved.

Catching up...City (below right) take on Real Madrid



The genesis lies back in 2009 when UEFA enacted its financial fairplay regulations, forcing clubs to provide accounted evidence that they were not spending more than they earned.

Michel Platini, UEFA's then-president, was the driving force. His concern was the increasing number of top-division European clubs going bankrupt and/or failing to pay their players on time and/or failing to honour transfer payments.

Speculation...Kevin De Bruyne (centre) with Pep Guardiola

Whatever else may be ascribed to Platini in the corridors of UEFA and FIFA power, he worked a miracle in pushing the project ahead in defiance of many big clubs and some of his own staff who thought it unworkable.

The regulations threatened uncooperative clubs with European bans, fines, the withholding of prize money and transfer prohibitions. However, the preference of both Platini and his uncertain legal advisers was carrot rather than stick: guilty clubs would be invited to negotiate a settlement over two or three years in return for a slap on the administrative wrist.

Platini said: "Fifty per cent of our clubs are losing money and we need to stop this downward spiral. We don't want to kill or hurt the clubs. This is to help them.

"Living within your means is essential for all of us and it's now time for football to do the same."

FFP was launched in 2011 and met predictable teething problems. A string of lower and middle-order clubs were punished, prompting complaints that the rules were a "giants' charter" which prevented them from rising up the football ladder.

Manchester City and PSG were caught early and settled. So while a UEFA panel led by David Gill, the ex-Manchester United CEO, was tasked to devise more flexibility, City chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak commented: "We have moved beyond the period of heavy investment required to make the club competitive."

In other words City and PSG had both accepted UEFA's yellow card of a €60m fine with €40m suspended and squad limitation as a necessary price for playing financial catch-up with the Real Madrids and Barcelonas.

Disciplinary actions began to flow as more clubs qualified for European competition and fell within the FFP remit. In February 2015, Liverpool and Sparta Prague were cleared of suspected

Test case...PSG's Neymar (left) and Kylian Mbappe

breaches but Hapoel Tel-Aviv (Israel), Hull City (England), Panathinaikos (Greece) and Ruch Chorzow (Poland) all had to enter into settlements.

One month later Platini was vindicated when he was re-elected UEFA president, with FFP working more dramatically than even he had expected. The total net losses of Europe's clubs had fallen from €1.7billion in 2011 to €400m.

Platini felt sufficiently encouraged to ease some transfer-spending rules and said: "The objectives remain the same but now we are evolving out of a period of austerity to one where we can offer more opportunities for growth again."

Days later the international game was engulfed in the FIFAGate scandal and within months Platini was banished himself. Not that it mattered as far as FFP was concerned as the principle, and the machinery, had not only been established but, apparently, set in stone.

Proof came in 2016 when Galatasaray appealed to CAS against a European ban. The case erupted from a highly complex domestic tangle involving high-level political and commercial interests. Galatasaray thought they had a solid case but CAS ruled in favour of UEFA.

UEFA, thus armed, imposed an even heavier three-year ban on Serbia's Partizan over unpaid transfer fees, wages and social and tax debts. Partizan could hardly complain: they had broken FFP rules three times in five years.

A new era dawned for UEFA with a new FFP challenge. Perceptions had

Appeal... Galatasaray (in red)

been growing that the CFCB was content to lay down the law to the modest and the minnows but reluctant to take on the big boys with their deep pockets to pay the finest legal brains.

In 2016 UEFA elected a new president in Aleksander Ceferin to succeed Platini, who had fallen victim to a FIFA financial tangle of his own making. Ceferin was a comparative unknown, but within a year he was presented with a major FFP test by PSG's record-busting purchases of Neymar from Barcelona and Kylian Mbappe from Monaco.

PSG were careful this time around. They paid €222m for Neymar but signed Mbappe on loan for a year, which meant the €140m purchase would figure in the next year's accounts.

Had they learned their lesson? Ceferin said: "I hope so. If that is not the case then we will teach them.

"I am not talking only about Paris Saint-Germain. We will apply exactly the same rules to all of them. If we did not respect our own rules then we would be a toothless tiger."

By now a new word had entered the football lexicon: sport-washing – the process through which rich Gulf states such as Qatar (PSG) and the UAE (City) were burnishing their national public image in the west via football.

Javier Tebas, combative president of the Spanish league, was furious. He said: "They are laughing at the system. It is not just about PSG but also Manchester City. What happens when this money comes into European football? It brings inflation of salaries and transfer fees.

"This is damaging football. There is an incredible risk when such money comes in from nation states."

UEFA continued to issue a mixture of

Ban...Milan (in stripes)

UEFA has lost three previous appeals by clubs to CAS

GALATASARAY
In February 2019, CAS ruled in favour of the Turkish club, who were found to have had contravened FFP regulations but had reached a settlement with UEFA which limited their squad size and transfer spending and withheld €15m in prize money. But when UEFA subsequently re-opened their investigation, Galatasaray appealed to CAS, who ruled in the Turkish club's favour because UEFA had failed to meet the timelines set out in its own regulations.

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN
In March 2019, PSG's appeal against a UEFA decision to reopen an investigation into alleged breaches of FFP rules was upheld by CAS. As with the case of Galatasaray, the French champions' successful appeal was based on a technicality, namely that UEFA had not followed the correct procedures when attempting to re-open its investigation.

MILAN
In June 2019 the Italian club struck a deal with UEFA, who had initially banned the club from Europe for two seasons for FFP overspending irregularities. The ban was overturned by CAS in 2018, only for Milan to be referred to UEFA's FFP watchdog again in April 2019. Milan's offer to remove themselves from one Europa League campaign was accepted by UEFA and CAS on the condition that they balance their books by June 2021.

bans and fines to clubs from Albania, Greece, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey. Finally they went in search of the big fish, banning Italy's Milan for a year and launching investigations into Galatasaray and PSG.

The investigations were closed and then reopened at the request of CFCB chair Jose Narciso da Cunha Rodrigues. But the reversions were submitted out of time and appeals on that technicality by both Galatasaray and PSG were vindicated by CAS.

By now, however, Football Leaks had exploded. Initially, UEFA felt unable to act on material hacked illicitly. But a change of heart was enabled after judicial authorities in at least nine countries took an active interest in suggestions of a wide range of misconduct including tax evasion by clubs, officials, agents and players.

UEFA ordered its club finance panel to investigate "several alleged violations of FFP that were recently made public in various media outlets", while City rejected "the accusation of financial irregularities [as] entirely false".

All of which means that UEFA, City and financial fairplay are now in uncharted waters. WS

Serious contenders

WORDS Paddy Agnew

There is more to Atalanta's run to the last eight of the Champions League than meets the eye

The first time your correspondent visited Atalanta Bergamasca Calcio football club at their Zingonia training centre, just outside the Lombardy town of Bergamo, I encountered some very interesting folks. The year was 1993 and the club's coach at the time was a dashing young man called Marcello Lippi, someone clearly headed for the top.

Lippi's Atalanta had just had the effrontery to beat Juventus 2-1 in Bergamo. Then, as now, "provincials" hardly ever beat Juve. Present that day was striker Maurizio Ganz, who ▸

Going through...Hans Hateboer (right) celebrates his goal as Atlanta head towards victory over Valencia in the Champions League round of 16

Shrewd...owner Antonio Percassi

had scored against Juventus, and one of the club's youth coaches, Cesare Prandelli. Like Lippi, Prandelli was also destined to lead Italy's national team one day, even if he did not, like Lippi, win the World Cup.

I tell this little story just to point out that Atalanta, while they are rightly referred to by Italian media as a "fairytale" team, are no johnny-come-lately outfit.

The Bergamo side, often called the "Queen of the Provincials", are clearly a club with a certain pedigree.

Founded in 1907, Atalanta BC have been a regular relegation battler in Serie A throughout the last century. Occasionally, though, they would play way above their stations.

> Atalanta, while they are rightly referred to by Italian media as a "fairytale" team, are no johnny-come-lately outfit

For example, there was a remarkable campaign in 1987-88 when Atalanta, then in Serie B but runners-up in the previous season's Coppa Italia, reached the semi-finals of the European Cup-winners Cup before going out to Belgian side Mechelen.

Back in 1963 Atalanta actually won the Italian Cup, beating Torino in the Final, but for all that they have, until very recently, been an honest broker, struggling down at the wrong end of the Serie A table, one of those provincial sides that has never come close to winning the title.

All that, of course, has now changed. So, where and when did the Atalanta "miracle" begin?

You could maybe point to the early 1990s when the current owner, Antonio Percassi, persuaded talented Como youth-team coach Mino Favini to take over Atalanta's already flourishing academy structure. Under Favini, who died last year, Atalanta laid the foundations for producing a conveyor belt of talented youngsters who were regularly sold on for a handsome profit.

In the last three seasons alone the club has cashed in on Andrea Conti (to Milan for €24m), Frank Kessie (Milan €28m), Bryan Cristante (Roma €21m), Leonardo Spinazzola (Juventus €25m), Gianluca Mancini (Roma, €25m), Mattia Caldara (Milan €25m) and Roberto Gagliardini (Internazionale €22m). And those are just the most obvious names that spring to mind, players on whom the club made a fabulous profit.

A flourishing youth-team sector, however, does not explain everything. There are at least two other key elements in the Atalanta success story, namely owner Percassi and current coach Gian Piero Gasparini.

Percassi is a remarkable figure, a rare talent in that he moved from being a footballer himself – with Atalanta until the age of 23 – to becoming a highly successful entrepreneur, heading a business empire that involves strategic alliances with multinational brands such as Benetton, Lego, Starbucks, Zara, Calvin Klein, Swatch, Nike and Kiko, as well as many others in the cosmetics, building and foods industries.

Percassi's shrewd handling of the club, left largely to his managing director son, Luca, has seen Atalanta develop step by step, always balancing the books and rarely indulging in expensive player buys. Not for nothing Atalanta last year recorded a third consecutive annual profit: namely €24.4m in 2018, €26.7m in 2017 and €300,000 in 2016. The Bergamo club also had the lowest annual turnover of all the teams in the knockout stage of this year's Champions League.

If the club's youth-team tradition and the business nous of Percassi have laid solid foundations, Atalanta have also been helped by impressive appointments,

Thrashed...Duvan Zapata scores in the 7-2 win at Lecce

starting with coach Gasperini.

A man who lasted just three months at Inter in the immediate traumatic wake of Jose Mourinho, Gasperini has long looked like an inspired coach, first at Genoa and now with Atalanta.

Beppe Bergomi, a 1982 World Cup winner and someone who has worked in the Atalanta youth set-up, says the arrival of Gasperini in 2016 provided the spark that prompted the club's explosion. Bergomi argues that Gasperini is a very different Italian coach, someone who wants his teams to impose an intense, aggressive game and is not frightened to play on the front foot.

"They're so intense," says Bergomi. "If you take the game against Lecce, you saw it all. Few sides can survive against them over the 90 minutes.

"Lecce did really well to get it back to 2-2 at half-time, but Atalanta just came out and bulldozed them off the park in the second half to win 7-2. Few teams can withstand them."

Bergomi argues that as well as being inspired by Gasperini, this Atalanta team have been carefully put together thanks to Atalanta's superb network of scouts, overseen by technical director Giovanni Sartori. Widely considered one of the best talent spotters in Italian football, Sartori was a key element in the remarkable success story of Chievo in the early years of this century. When Sartori resigned from Chievo in 2014, Percassi did not hang about and bought him to Atalanta within a month.

Atalanta are clearly a potent expression of Bergamo, a handsome city some 40km from Milan which is fiercely proud of its Lombardy heritage.

Carlo Cavanesi of the local paper, *L'Eco di Bergamo*, is just one of many who acknowledge that the good folk of Bergamo are getting just a little excited, arguing that there is plenty more to come and pointing to the club's ambitious redevelopment of the old Stadio Azzurri d'Italia as proof of their continuing growth and ambition.

One suspects that you are going to hear a lot more about Atalanta. WS

Excited...Atlanta's fans are proud of their club's achievements

Intense...Hans Hateboer (left) and Josip Ilicic in the thick of things against Valencia

Gomez & Ilicic
Atalanta's little and large

One of the observations often made about Atalanta is how coach Gian Piero Gasperini brings out the best in players.

Those who looked ordinary elsewhere begin to look like world beaters when they line up for him. Likewise, many of those who leave Atalanta rarely look as good once sold to bigger clubs.

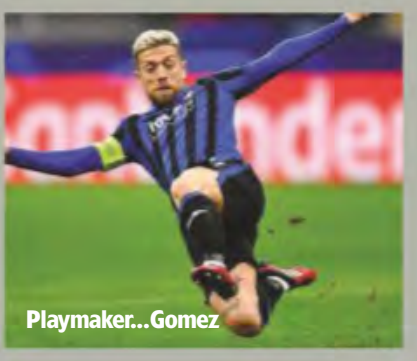
The perfect point in case are Argentinian playmaker Alejandro "Papu" Gomez

Goals...Ilicic

and Slovene attacking midfielder Josip Ilicic.

In their previous footballing lives – Gomez at Catania and Ilicic with both Palermo and Fiorentina – both looked good Serie A players if not inspirational match winners. Under Gasperini's attack-minded coaching they have become the double cherry on the Atalanta cake.

If Gomez sets them up, Ilicic puts them away – as underlined by his five goals in the 8-4 aggregate Champions League



Playmaker...Gomez

victory against Valencia.

Make no mistake, Atalanta have a talented squad, and the likes of Dutch defender Hans Hateboer, Swiss midfielder Remo Freuler, Ukraine midfielder Ruslan Malinovskyi, on loan Croat midfielder Mario Pasalic and Colombian striker Duvan Zapata can all play.

Inspired by Gomez, with Ilicic up front and guided by Gasperini, this is a serious side.

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

BIG-CLUB PROTÉGÉS

Words Nick Bidwell

Riqui PUIG

Barcelona

In a sentence
Creative midfielder cut from the Xavi/Andres Iniesta cloth: small of stature yet huge in ability.

What they say
Sergio Espejo, his coach as a schoolboy at the Unio Jabac club: "What he did when he was young is now being repeated at the Camp Nou. He was not afraid of anything. He was especially daring, a different sort of talent."

Barcelona B boss Xavi Garcia Pimienta: "He has an inborn talent. He's overflowing with vision and cheek. He doesn't know fear. He doesn't care if a tall opponent is towering over him. He believes in himself. He has that Barca DNA."

The story so far
Born in August 1999 in Matadepera, a small Catalan town 50km north of Barcelona, he had his first taste of organised football at the age of eight with the Unio Jabac club in nearby Terrassa and quickly emerged as the pick of the litter there.

The region's two biggest clubs, Barcelona and Espanyol, tried to persuade him to join their schoolboy set-up but his parents declined both offers and felt he would be better off maturing at Jabac.

Eventually inducted into the Barca academy at 14 – having sealed the deal with an impressive performance in a friendly against a Danish club side – he excelled as either a false nine or an attacking midfielder at La Masia. He made his debut for Barca B in February 2018 in a second-tier game against Gimnastic of Tarragona and broke into the first team at the end of that year, marking his senior bow with an assist in a Copa del Rey win over Cultural Leonesa.

He helped Barcelona win the UEFA Youth League in 2018 and was given his first La Liga start in April 2019 in a goalless draw with Huesca. He did not play a single minute in the first-half of this season, but after Quique Setien replaced Ernesto Valverde as coach in January he was back in the frame and was deployed as a substitute in a 1-0 home win over Granada.

> "He has an inborn talent. He's overflowing with vision and cheek. He doesn't know fear"
> **Barcelona B-team coach Xavi Garcia Pimienta**

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT PUIG

- His father, Carles, played left-back in the Spanish second and third divisions for Terrassa.
- After impressing for the Barca first team during a pre-season tournament in America in 2018 he was singled out for praise by Milan coach Gennaro Gattuso who said: "He was spectacular. It was something close to poetry."
- Not surprisingly, his role models are Lionel Messi and Xavi.

The next step
Now 20, he has a big decision to make. With just over a year left on his contract, and the signs being that Setien has gone cold on his initial promise to offer more first-team opportunities to homegrown youngsters, the life-long Barca fan may have to look elsewhere for regular top-tier action. If he does have a future at Camp Nou it could depend on Ivan Rakitic and Arturo Vidal being moved on.

Strengths
His intelligence, awareness, touch and mesmerising trickery between the lines. With his quick feet and low centre of gravity, he is difficult to dispossess.

Weaknesses
He still has a lot to learn about the defensive demands of the modern game and can hold onto the ball a little too long at times.

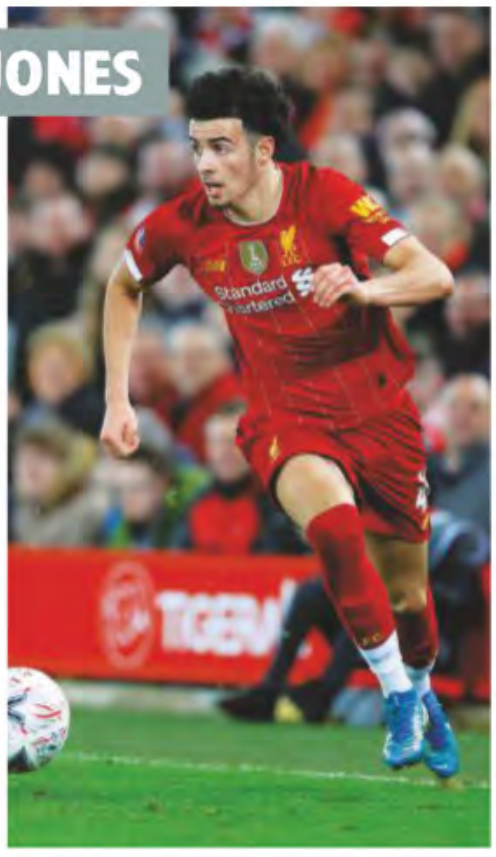
Lars Lukas MAI

Bayern Munich
The Bayern powers-that-be hope the German under-20 stopper will be the next to bridge the gap between the reserves and the first team. Signed six years ago from his hometown club Dynamo Dresden, he recently penned an extension to his contract with the Bavarians until the summer of 2022.

Ryan GRAVENBERCH

Ajax
It speaks volumes that super-agent Mino Raiola looks after the 17-year-old midfielder. Long regarded as one of the biggest talents in Holland, he has been in fine form for the Ajax B side this term, earning a first-team call-up in December. Scored in consecutive wins over Den Haag and Sparta Rotterdam.

Curtis JONES



Liverpool
The Merseyside born-and-bred midfielder has shone in cup competitions this season, netting a hatful of goals in the UEFA Youth League and scoring for the first team in the FA Cup against local rivals Everton and Shrewsbury Town. Now 19, he was playing for Liverpool's under-23 side when he was just 16.

Alejandro MARQUES

Juventus
Born in Venezuela, the naturalised Spanish striker joined Juventus from Barcelona, where he scored twice in their 3-0 victory against Chelsea in the 2018 UEFA Youth League Final. He was also a member of the Spanish squad that won the 2019 European under-19 title.

Umaro EMBALO

Benfica
Portuguese winger of Guinea-Bissau extraction who can score spectacular goals with either foot – as was demonstrated by the left-footed long-range curler he produced for Benfica's B team this season against Oliveirense. With Manchester United and RB Leipzig both said to be among his growing list of admirers, he agreed to a contract extension last summer and is now tied to the Lisbon club until 2024, with a release clause of €60m.

Tanguy KOUASSI

Paris Saint-Germain
The imposing homegrown centre-back or midfield enforcer has made supersonic progress these past few months, to the point where PSG coach Thomas Tuchel had no hesitation throwing him in at the deep end for a Champions League tie against Galatasaray

Fabio VIEIRA

Porto
Left-footed, right-sided midfielder cum winger who can hurt defences in all manner of ways, with his close control and trickery out wide, his Arjen Robben-like moves inside, his composed finishing and his ability to spread the play with raking coast-to-coast passes. Earned his first call-up to Portugal's under-21 squad last autumn and scored twice in a 3-2 win in Norway. Recently started training with the Porto first-team squad.

Youssoufa MOUKOKO

Borussia Dortmund
He may only be 15 but this season he has been prolific for Dortmund's under-19 side, with 36 goals in all competitions by early March. Born in Cameroon but qualified to play for Germany through residence, he was leading the line for the *Deutschland* under-16 team at just 12 years of age.

SPECIAL FEATURE

GOING GLOBAL

Dortmund have a new world superstar on their hands. Nick Bidwell reports

Erling Haaland's remarkable productivity since arriving at Borussia Dortmund from Red Bull Salzburg in January, with 12 goals in his first eight competitive games, has turned the 19-year-old Norwegian striker into a global phenomenon.

And his instant success at the Westfalenstadion has boosted the *Dortmunder* in every possible way: on the field, in the dressing room and boardroom, and on the terraces.

Mid-term transfers can be hit-or-miss affairs, not least due to the limited number of top ▸

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BVB

players available. But Dortmund certainly struck gold with Haaland. Often sloppy and inconsistent, Dortmund were a pale imitation of a title candidate last autumn. Now, with Haaland leading the charge, anything looks possible.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Dortmund's swoop for Haaland was the internal HR dynamics at play behind the scenes at the Ruhr club. Only last summer coach Lucien Favre was adamant the side did not need to dip into the market for another striker, insisting he was more than happy to use the mobile and freewheeling Paco Alcacer and Mario Gotze at the point of attack. According to insiders, Favre was not at all interested in a big, bullish centre-forward such as Haaland.

Ultimately, however, it would not be Favre's decision to make. In Germany it is the chief executive and director of sport who call the tune, and Dortmund's Hans-Joachim Watzke and Michael Zorc most definitely had a soft spot for Haaland.

The teenager had been on the duo's radar for quite some time, and with so many other clubs – among them Manchester United, Juventus and RB Leipzig – hot on the trail, Watzke and Zorc decided to go for broke, eventually persuading the Norwegian to sign a four-and-a-half-year contract.

> "You have to give a 19-year-old a breather from time to time. We have to be careful"
>
> **Dortmund boss Lucien Favre**

Two points need to be made. One: Dortmund remain very much the number one destination for up-and-coming youngsters in Europe. Two: here was a case of the Dortmund power-brokers tacitly confessing to past failures in recruitment policy; a clear admission that for far too long – since Robert Lewandowski moved to Bayern Munich in 2014 – they had suffered from the lack of a genuine central striker.

In an interview with *Kicker* magazine published in mid-January, a fortnight after Haaland signed for Dortmund, Favre denied that he had to be sold the merits of the deal and has subsequently been unstinting in his praise of the young goalgetter. And why wouldn't he? Haaland is the winning lottery ticket, delivering a supersub hat-trick on his debut, in a 5-3 win at Augsburg, and netting a brace in a Champions League round-of-16 first-leg victory over Paris Saint-Germain.

Opener...the first of his two goals against Paris Saint-Germain

Haaland's statistics this term speak for themselves: 39 goals in all competitions for Salzburg and Dortmund up to the end of February, including no fewer than six hat-tricks.

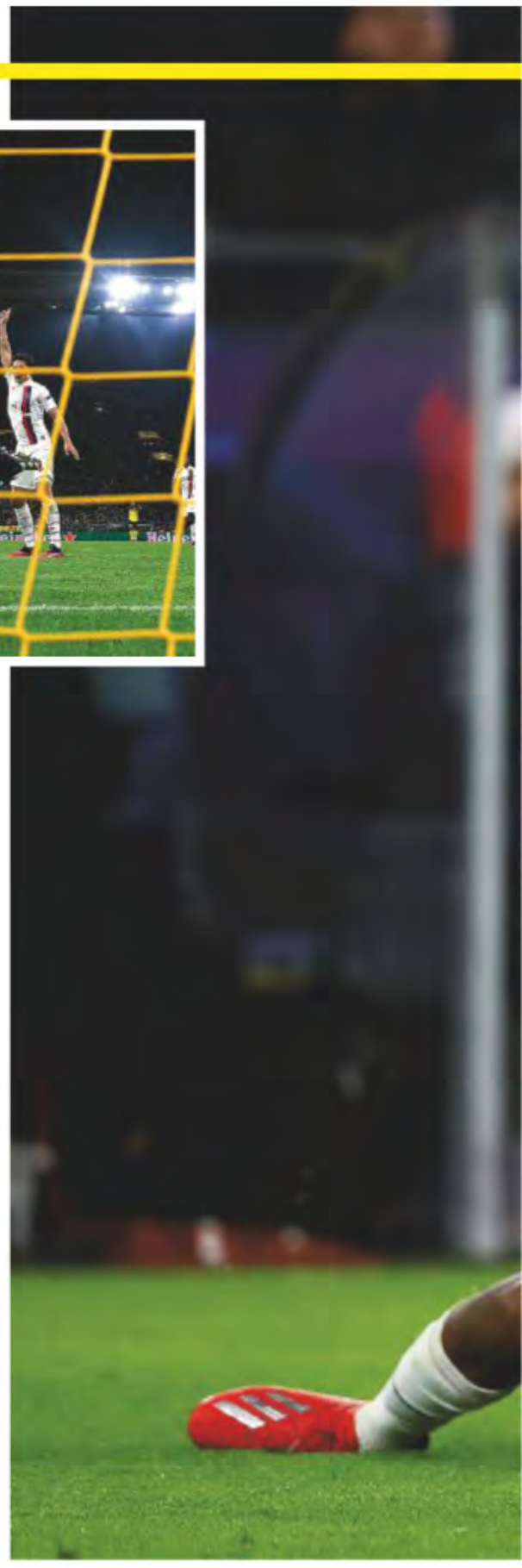
Amid all the media frenzy, Favre knows only too well that he must do all he can to throw a protective blanket over the teenager in order to keep a lid on the hype factory.

"He scored so many great goals for Salzburg and I don't see why he shouldn't continue like this in the German Bundesliga," Favre told *Kicker*. "However, it's obvious that he can't play every match.

"You have to give a 19-year-old a breather from time to time. We have to be careful. In attack he's not our only option." Some would vehemently argue with the last point.

Much has been made of the club's signing coup, with the media concentrating on the fact that Dortmund only had to stump up €20million to trigger Haaland's release from Salzburg. But that is by no means the bottom line in the outgoings column. When transfer fee, agent bill, salary and signing-on monies are taken into account, the complete financial package comes to far nearer €100m.

While Dortmund are counting on being able to make a serious return on their investment, they will not have a licence to print money. German magazine *Sport Bild* recently reported that Haaland's contract contains a more than affordable €75m exit clause, which could come into play as early as 2022. *Sport Bild*'s information is that Haaland and his entourage had hoped to set the release figure at €50m but Dortmund would not play ball, insisting that the bar be set 50 per cent higher.



Normally Dortmund avoid buy-out clauses in contracts. The last player they allowed to have one was Gotze, who controversially left for Bayern in a €37m deal in 2013. Dortmund swore they would never be caught out again, yet they simply had to compromise to bring Haaland on board.

That's Haaland's agent Mino Raiola for you, invariably striking a hard bargain.

Dortmund do possess one magic bullet, though. In the event of Haaland leaving before the end of his contract, the club will recoup all the money they spent on him, including salary, agent commissions, special payments and bonuses – which is a pretty good insurance policy.

Needless to say, Haaland has exceeded all expectations at Dortmund these past few weeks. After watching him rack up 28 goals for Salzburg in the first half of this season, every member of the

Debut...celebrating against Augsburg, a game in which he scored a hat-trick

German media knew a young star was on the way. But no one could possibly have imagined him immediately ending up in the stratosphere.

Early in January, 10 days before his debut for the club, the cover of *Kicker* summed up the general mood by stating: "The Great Hope. Dortmund bet on Erling Haaland. But the 19-year-old will not solve all their problems on his own."

Yet the left-footer seems to have done just that. First and foremost he is the striker Dortmund have lacked for years: a voraciously hungry seeker of goals, a tall and muscular advanced focal point, excellent in his combination play and movement, and imbued with an impressive work ethic both on and off the ball. Deceptively quick, he is in his element when loitering on the shoulder of the last defender. Teams who aim to counter Dortmund with a high defensive line are asking for trouble.

Key...he has quickly become the focal point of Dortmund's attack

Family affair...with his dad, former Norway international Alf-Inge Haaland

Thanks in no small part to him, Dortmund have become a completely different attacking proposition. Going forward they were essentially a troupe of roving ball-artists prior to his arrival. These days they attack with more directness and aggression. Haaland has brought a single-mindedness to the mix, with straight-for-goal effectiveness prioritised over the decorative.

The teen has also sparked a change in attitude at Dortmund. His energy, will to win and positive body language have undoubtedly rubbed off on his team-mates and there is far less mental flakiness in the ranks. Nor is it a coincidence that the Ruhr giants are much-improved defensively. The threat of Haaland is forcing opponents to be more conservative, sitting back in greater numbers and wary of flooding forward. The Dortmund rearguard is thus enjoying some respite. The fear factor works.

"Haaland is a full-on type who can bring others along with him through his personality," says Zorc. "He's the complete package and is good for us."

Dortmund are reaping a substantial Haaland bonus on other fronts too. In the first week of January the club sold 5,000 of his number 17 shirt and at the Westfalenstadion there is a palpable buzz of excitement every time he approaches the ball. Dortmund fans, connoisseurs of whole-hearted talent, know a good thing when they see it and they sense a brave new world on the horizon.

One player may not make a team but, as Erling Haaland has shown, the right acquisition can light a fuse. Stand well back. The explosion is ongoing. WS

6 of the best

Sons of their father

Erling Haaland isn't the only one with a famous footballing dad. Nick Bidwell selects six more

1 Marcos LLORENTE (ATLETICO MADRID)

The defensive midfielder, who Atletico acquired from Real Madrid in the close season, has an awe-inspiring family tree.

His father Paco featured on the flank for Real in the 1980s and 90s; his great uncle Francisco Gento, another wing wizard, won six European Champions Cups with the club; while his maternal grandfather Ramon Grosso was a long-serving front-line headliner for Real. Meanwhile, his uncle Julio Llorente was a rugged defender who also played for *Los Blancos* alongside his dad.

Voted Man of the Match after scoring in Real's victory over Al Ain in the 2018 Club World Cup Final, he initially found the going tough at Atletico but has enjoyed more game time in 2020, with Diego Simeone using his industry on the right side of the engine room.

2 Mattheus OLIVEIRA (SPORTING)

The son of World Cup winner Bebeto, who famously marked his birth in 1994 with a "cradle the baby" goal celebration in Brazil's quarter-final victory over Holland at the World Cup in America.

Named after Germany's Lothar Matthaus, the attacking midfielder showed a great deal of promise at Estoril – earning himself a move to Sporting in 2017 – and during a subsequent two-season loan spell at Vitoria Guimaraes. But now back at Sporting he has, to all intents and purposes, been frozen out.

Some speculate he is paying the price for refusing another temporary posting last summer, but the former Brazil under-20 deserves a better fate.

Sporting's midfield play has not passed muster this term and they could use his thumping left-foot shot and passing ability.

3 Daniel MALDINI
(MILAN)

The 18-year-old attacking midfielder, who recently made his Serie A debut as a sub against Verona, is the third generation of the Maldini dynasty to wear the colours of the *Rossoneri*, following in the footsteps of grandfather Cesare – who skippered the club to the European Champions Cup title in 1963 – and father Paolo, an outstanding servant of the club for two-and-a-half decades.

Unlike his illustrious forebears, both of whom were defenders, he is a creative type, brimming over with craft, vision and anticipation.

Former Milan youth-section chief Filippo Galli – who is an ex-team-mate of Paolo Maldini – praises Daniel for his innate feel for the game and his appreciation of time and space around him.

4 RIVALDINHO
(VIITORUL)

As the striker admits, it is "more a burden than a help" to be the offspring of Brazil's Rivaldo and comparisons with his father are, inevitably, unfavourable.

For much of his career the 24-year-old has struggled for acceptance on his own terms, making next to no impact at Boavista in Portugal, Levski Sofia and leading Brazilian side Internacional. Even when Internacional were sensationally relegated to the second tier in 2016 they could still not find a place for him.

Fortunately for the son and heir, a mid-term move last season to Romanian top-flight side Viitorul has worked out splendidly.

5 Giovanni REYNA
(BORUSSIA DORTMUND)

Bearing in mind the achievements of his father Claudio – 112 caps for the USA, national-team captaincy, his participation in three World Cup finals and starring roles for clubs in the Bundesliga and Premier League – "Gio" has the toughest of acts to follow.

Yet the signs so far for the 17-year-old attacking midfielder all look good and just eight months after joining Dortmund from New York City FC he is already making a name for himself on the German and European circuit, scoring in the DFB Cup against Werder Bremen and appearing as a sub in a 2-1 victory over Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League.

While his lot, for now, is first XI cameos, he has way too much talent to remain a part-timer, with his pace, ball skills, eye for a pass and sniper-like marksmanship.

6 Ianis HAGI
(RANGERS)

After struggling to make his mark in Belgium with Genk, the playmaker son of Romanian great Gheorghe Hagi has finally started to fulfil his potential following a loan move to Rangers in January.

Two goals in his side's 3-2 victory over Braga saw the Scottish club progress to the last 16 of the Europa League and put teams all over Europe on alert – particularly back in Italy, where he had a torrid time with Fiorentina four seasons ago.

Glenn Moore

Into the last eight

Champions League reaches quarter-final stage

Alex Scott is now best known as a performer in the hit TV series *Strictly Come Dancing* and as one of the stars of the first generation of female football pundits on English TV. Prior to that she was a World Cup bronze-medal winning England left-back, earning more than a century of international caps.

But Scott has another unique, claim to fame: she is the only player to score for a British club in a women's European Final. Moreover, her goal against Swedish side Umea in the 2007 UEFA Women's Cup Final won the precursor to the Women's Champions League, capping a seasonal quadruple for an Arsenal team that dominated English women's football in the opening decade of the century.

No British club has reached the Final since. In the last six years Birmingham City, Chelsea, Manchester City and Arsenal have reached the semi-finals, but the only British Final representation has been through individuals: Lucy Bronze and Jess Fishlock (both Lyon), and Toni Duggan (Barcelona).

After a five-season absence Arsenal are back in Europe this term and have progressed to the quarter-finals.

Under Australian boss Joe Montemurro they have rediscovered their zest, stylishly winning the WSL title last season. While Scotland's Kim Little, England's Jordan Nobbs and Holland's Danielle Van de Donk comprise a midfield with creativity and bite, newly acquired Australian Caitlin Foord and England's Beth Mead support the razor-sharp Dutch striker Vivianne Miedema in attack. However, Little and Mead have been out injured and Arsenal lost the League Cup Final 2-1 to Chelsea despite dominating the play.

Although Arsenal remain in the FA Cup their focus is on Europe, and such is the level of investment by the leading English clubs it seems inevitable that Scott's goal will soon lose its uniqueness. And Arsenal will obviously want to win their second title before Chelsea or Manchester City can claim a first.

Speaking before the draw for the knockout stage Montemurro said: "As much as we dread meeting the likes of Lyon in this competition, I'm pretty sure that they'll dread meeting us too because we're not here to just fill up numbers, we're here to go all the way."

Arsenal were subsequently pitched into Lyon's half of the draw, though they must first play PSG, while defending champions Lyon face Bayern Munich.

The other half of the draw features two-time winners Wolfsburg against Glasgow City, and an all-Spanish tie between last year's runners-up Barcelona and Atletico Madrid.

> "As much as we dread meeting the likes of Lyon in this competition, I'm pretty sure that they'll dread meeting us too because we're not here to just fill up numbers"
>
> Arsenal boss Joe Montemurro

History suggests a third Final in five years between Lyon and Wolfsburg, who have not lost a tie in Europe to anyone but Lyon since 2015, but this year could be different. Lyon, winners of the last four Finals, will be without Ada Hegerberg – whose record 53 goals in the competition includes a hat-trick in last year's Final – after the Norwegian suffered an ACL injury in January.

Lyon still have a lethal attack with Jean-Luc Vasseur able to choose from Eugenie Le Sommer, Delphine Cascarino and Nikita Parris to lead the line and plenty of goalscoring threats in midfield. Nevertheless, Hegerberg's absence is a blow that Bayern will hope to exploit.

Wolfsburg, already on course to retain their domestic title, should ease past a Glasgow side who have already exceeded expectations given the club is part-time, and their semi-final ought to be trickier whichever Spanish club emerges.

Moving into March, Barcelona had established a nine-point domestic league lead over an Atletico side now on their third coach of the season. Averaging four goals a game, with Jennifer Hermoso and Asisat Oshoala both in the 20s, Barca do not look like slipping up at home but Europe provides Atletico with a chance to reassert themselves.

This is the penultimate season under the current format and from 2021-22 the last 16 will become a group stage with four quartets.

Entry will be expanded to three clubs from the six countries highest in the UEFA women's club coefficient. Given the current standings that would be France, Germany, England, Spain, Sweden and Czech Republic.

"I'm thrilled that we are taking this

Hopeful...Atletico Madrid's Aissatou Tounkara and Asisat Oshoala of Barcelona (above, left and right), and Vivianne Miedema of Arsenal (right, in red)

Surprise...part-timers Glasgow City

significant and critical step for the development of women's football," says Nadine Kessler, the former German international who is now UEFA's head of women's football. "The competition is the most prestigious club competition in female football globally. We want to build on this reputation." Expect that growing reputation to draw more American players to Europe next season.

Step by step the women's Champions League is coming to resemble the men's – for example, already this year's last eight features only Glasgow from outside the "big five" leagues.

The big question now is how long can Lyon keep the likes of Barca at bay? WS

THE DRAW

QUARTER-FINALS
Atletico Madrid v Barcelona
Lyon v Bayern Munich
Glasgow City v Wolfsburg
Arsenal v Paris Saint-Germain
Ties to be played March 25 & April 1

SEMI-FINALS
Glasgow City/Wolfsburg v Atletico Madrid/Barcelona
Arsenal/Paris Saint-Germain v Lyon/Bayern Munich
Ties to be played April 25/26 & May 2/3

FINAL
(in Vienna)
May 24

Round-up

Through ...Australia's Hayley Raso (left)

TOKYO TAKING SHAPE

Zambia will compete in the women's Olympic tournament for the first time this summer after beating Cameroon on away goals following a 4-4 draw on aggregate in the African qualifying Final. Cameroon now meet South American runners-up Chile in a two-leg play-off.

Australia also booked a slot with victory against Vietnam but the final Asian qualifier remains unknown as the China v South Korea tie was put back to June due to the Coronavirus.

CORONAVIRUS DISRUPTION

On their return from a Euro 2021 qualifier against Kosovo in Germany – the game was played on neutral territory as Russia does not recognise the Balkan state – the Russian team was told to self-isolate to guard against the spread of coronavirus. Elsewhere, Morocco was one of the first countries to play games behind closed doors, while there were postponements in Italy.

SAUDIS START NEW LEAGUE

A ground-breaking league is being launched in Saudi Arabia, which until 2018 did not allow women to attend games and still does not have a female national team, although occasional games have been played between women's sides in the kingdom since 2008. Amnesty International decried the development as a distraction from an "abysmal human rights situation" but some analysts suggested it was a sign of liberalisation. It is not yet clear who will be permitted to watch the matches.

Success... Melbourne City

CITY TRIUMPH AGAIN

Successive 4-0 wins away at Melbourne Victory and Western Sydney Wanderers enabled Melbourne City to wrap up their second regular season W-League title with a game to spare. Nevertheless, Victory and Wanderers joined City in the play-off series along with Sydney FC, with the Melbourne clubs having home advantage in the semis.

Moving...Thembi Kgatlana

BANYANA BANYANA'S KGATLANA JOINS BENFICA

Thembi Kgatlana, who is regarded as South Africa's leading player, joined Portuguese title contenders Benfica from Beijing BG Phoenix. Kgatlana was one of the three finalists to be 2019 African Women's Player of the Year, along with Cameroon's Ajara Nchout (Valerenga) and Asisat Oshoala, of Nigeria. Barcelona's Oshoala won the crown for the fourth time.

SPANISH PLAYERS AGREE DEAL

After more than a year of negotiations and a brief strike, players in La Liga finally agreed a pay deal with their clubs. The agreement cites a minimum salary of €16,000 plus paid holiday, injury cover, maternity benefits and pregnancy cover.

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INCORPORATING Global diary

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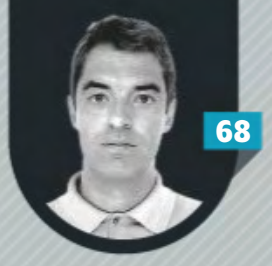

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Nightmare...Esperance's triple dream is over

All to play for

Nick Bidwell looks at the factors, both positive and negative, facing all 16 Euro 2020 play-off contenders

Iceland v Romania

ICELAND

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 Memories still burn bright of their Euro 2016 heroics, particularly the sensational round-of-16 victory over England. Thoughts of more continental glory are bound to fire up the hosts.

2 Coach Erik Hamren puts his side's chances of victory against the Romanians at 55-45 in Iceland's favour. Home advantage at a rocking Laugardalsvollur arena could tip the balance even further.

3 Their ability to make goals out of nothing, to live off scraps and then strike, of which Kolbeinn Sigthorsson is a perfect example.

Three Fear Factors

1 They are undoubtedly an ageing team and fielded no fewer than seven thirtysomethings in the 1-0 home loss to France in October. No one can defy the passing of the years.

2 Iceland are rarely comfortable playing on the front foot and in a one-off tie on home soil they will be expected to take the initiative. They would much rather play a counter-attacking, waiting game.

3 The last time Hamren was involved in a major tournament play-off he ended up on the losing side. Back in the autumn of 2013 his Sweden side lost 4-2 on aggregate to Portugal in a World Cup repechage.

Evergreen...Claudiu Keseru (no13)

Living off scraps... Iceland's Ragnar Sigurdsson (no6) and Kari Arnason keep out Turkey

ROMANIA

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 Playmaker Ianis Hagi and striker George Puscas are a talented pair of young guns who, on their day, can combine beautifully.

2 Mirel Radoi's appointment as coach last autumn should bring added freshness and enthusiasm to the ranks. Coach of the Romanian under-21 side that reached the semi-finals of last year's European Championship, he has indicated that the promotion of youngsters will be a priority.

3 Evergreen 33-year-old front-man Claudiu Keseru may not start, but he is as hungry as ever and will be a more than useful impact sub.

Three Fear Factors

1 Defensively they are not as well organised or drilled as they ought to be. Once a Romanian international stopper himself, Radoi needs to iron out those awkward wrinkles.

2 In qualification they had a lot of problems when facing Scandinavian opposition and were winless in four games against Norway and Sweden. Will Iceland's power be too much?

3 Battle-hardened centre-back Vlad Chiriches looks likely to miss the showdown in Reykjavik as he has been sidelined for several months following a groin problem.

Bulgaria v Hungary

Hopeful... Bulgaria's Galin Ivanov (no18) takes on Norway in the Nations League

BULGARIA

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 The influence and experience of veteran attacking midfielder Ivelin Popov. After 13 years in the international saddle he is still bright, active and able.

2 New coach Georgi Dermendzhiev – who took over when legendary ex-playmaker Krasimir Balakov quit back in October – may not have the Hollywood name of his predecessor but may be just what they need: a competent, safe pair of hands. The 64-year-old steered Ludogorets to three straight Bulgarian league title wins and the group stage of the 2014-15 Champions League.

3 The aerial threat from set-pieces of central defender Vasil Bozhikov. He is captain of Slovakian side Slovan Bratislava and is one of Bulgaria's emotional leaders.

Three Fear Factors

1 Their disastrous record in the qualifying group, only recording one win in eight encounters. Home form is another major concern. Since the start of 2019 they have prevailed in just one match when playing on their own patch: a 1-0 victory over Czech Republic in November in their final qualifier.

2 They have few good striking options. Lokomotiv Plovdiv's Dimitar Iliev, who was recently voted the country's player of the year, could hold the antidote but he only earned his first cap in February and at 31 he has it all to prove.

3 They have major defensive frailties, among them a tendency to ball watch and dive in impulsively for tackles. They can be carved open far too easily.

Accomplished...Peter Gulacsi has been in great form this season

HUNGARY

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 RB Leipzig's Peter Gulacsi is one of the most accomplished goalkeepers in the German Bundesliga. A wonderful shot-stopper, he is so hard to beat in one-on-one situations.

2 The Magyars have an uncanny knack for raising the game when the stakes are high, as demonstrated in victories against Croatia and Wales in qualification.

3 They have the most valuable of motivational tools: should they make the finals they could be in line to play their two opening group games at home in Budapest.

Three Fear Factors

1 They will be without influential centre-back and captain Willi Orban who underwent a knee operation in October and will not be available before April.

2 They can be extremely vulnerable to a swift counter-attack. Sometimes there is an all-or-nothing aspect to their forward play with insufficient attention paid to keeping the back door shut.

3 First-choice striker Adam Szalai is having a dreadful season in Germany with Mainz and is no longer an automatic starter in the Bundesliga.

Slovakia v Republic of Ireland

Threat...Matt Doherty (far left) heads home against Denmark

REP OF IRELAND

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 They have an excellent pedigree in major tournament play-offs, successfully taking that route to the 2002 World Cup and European Championships of 2012 and 2016.

2 Mick McCarthy has a valiant, never-say-die bunch. Hence the late equalisers in qualifying draws against Switzerland and Denmark.

3 With skipper Seamus Coleman ruled out with a thigh injury, Wolves' outstanding right-back Matt Doherty should more than compensate as a replacement. His flair for goals could be Ireland's not-so secret weapon.

Three Fear Factors

1 They have been short of attacking firepower for quite some time and during qualification they only scored seven goals in eight fixtures, which is a poor return in anyone's book. Shane Long, who has scored many a vital goal for the Irish, would be the answer if he was not so injury prone.

2 McCarthy's visceral unwillingness to blood youngsters, even though they have a number of promising fledgling forwards such as Aaron Connolly, Michael Obafemi, Troy Parrott and Adam Idah.

3 The financial and structural shambles that is the FAI and huge net liabilities of more than €55million point to an existential crisis. How can the players not be affected?

SLOVAKIA

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 Much-coveted centre-back Milan Skriniar and creative midfielder Marek Hamsik. The latter, now aged 32 and enjoying one last pay day in China with Dalian Professional, is not quite the player he once was, yet he remains a genuine game changer.

2 Dynamic, industrious and tactically astute, their midfield is a highly complimentary unit, comprising Hamsik, solid defensive midfielder Stanislav Lobotka and box-to-box operative Juraj Kucka.

3 Emerging talent Robert Bozenik, who recently left MSK Zilina for Dutch side Feyenoord, looks to have a great international future. The 24-year-old has netted four goals in his last five national team starts.

Emerging talent...Robert Bozenik

Three Fear Factors

1 They have never beaten the Republic of Ireland and the five head-to-heads are made up of four draws and a 1-0 defeat in Dublin in 2007. The absence of injured keeper Martin Dubravka will not help matters, either.

2 Normally Slovak coach Pavel Hapal goes with a compact 4-3-3 system, which leaves acres of wide room for opponents to exploit. This should be meat and drink to an old-school Irish side that loves to put in as many crosses as humanly possible.

3 Any home advantage in Bratislava may be negated by the Slovak government's decision to play the game behind closed doors following coronavirus cases in the country.

Bosnia v Northern Ireland

Class...Edin Dzeko (right) and Miralem Pjanic

BOSNIA

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 Their world-class big guns: centre-forward and skipper Edin Dzeko and cultured schemer Miralem Pjanic. If those two deliver individually so does the collective.

2 Only appointed late last year, new coach Dusan Bajevic is a wily, experienced old hand and, more importantly, he is a winner. The architect of multiple Greek league titles with AEK and Olympiakos, although he is far less excitable than his predecessor Robert Prosinecki.

3 In the 2018 Nations League they beat Northern Ireland home and away, prevailing 2-1 in Belfast and 2-0 in Sarajevo. A sure psychological edge.

Three Fear Factors

1 The failure of attempts to lure centre-back Ognjen Vranjes out of international retirement. What message did that send out to the other stoppers in the current squad?

2 A track record of disappointment and false dawns in tournament play-offs: twice undone by Portugal (in the repechage for the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012) and losing to the Republic of Ireland at the final fence en route to Euro 2016.

3 Their poor form in Euro 2020 qualification. They lost five of their 10 ties and only finished fourth in Group J behind Italy, Finland and Greece.

Organised...Michael Smith (19) and Craig Cathcart

NORTHERN IRELAND

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 They will have been buoyed by a very strong qualifying campaign, coming third in a tough group behind Germany and Holland, being good enough to hold an excellent Dutch side to a goalless draw in Belfast.

2 It will be a last hurrah for coach Michael O'Neill who, after eight glorious years in charge, will walk away once the play-off account is settled. The Stoke City boss has worked wonders for the team and is a wonderful man-manager and organiser.

3 Very much a player on the up, Stuart Dallas brings triple quantities of energy, aggression and versatility to the table. A favourite of Leeds United coach Marcelo Bielsa, he can operate on either flank or in central midfield.

Three Fear Factors

1 The goalkeeping spot is a huge area of concern. Neither Bailey Peacock-Farrell (Burnley), Michael McGovern (Norwich) nor Trevor Carson (Motherwell) are enjoying regular first-team football. Indeed, McGovern and Peacock-Farrell are third choice at their respective clubs.

2 They are sure to miss midfielder Corry Evans, who fractured his skull and an eye socket in a horrific incident early this year.

3 The assumption that the two Irish nations will meet in a Path B showdown ignores the fact that there is a semi-final to be won first.

Norway v Serbia

Solid...Norway defender Kristoffer Ajer (in white)

NORWAY

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 Up to now, marksman Erling Haaland has featured little for the national team. But with the teenager in such a rich vein of form, how can coach Lars Lagerback ignore him?

2 As he proved at the helm of Sweden and Iceland, Lagerback excels in defensive organisation and has managed to make the Norwegians a very tough nut to crack. Their high-pressing game is very effective and they do not easily lose their shape. Just the one defeat in qualification speaks for itself.

3 Rampaging right-back Omar Elabdellaoui is their ace in the hole, forever looking to push forward and often found higher up the pitch than right-sided midfielder Stefan Johansen.

Three Fear Factors

1 The repeated hamstring problems of striker Joshua King. It's been an affliction for the 28-year-old throughout his career, with three flare-ups this term.

2 While their approach play has been fluid enough under Lagerback, many of their attacks seem to lose momentum in and around the penalty area. At times they can be a little primitive going forward, repeatedly launching long balls and looking to win the second phase.

3 Norway's number one keeper Rune Jarstein has had a season to forget at Hertha Berlin in the Bundesliga and is now on the bench. A demotion at just the wrong time.

SERBIA

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 Their creative midfield ranks – not least Dusan Tadic, Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, Filip Kostic and Mijat Gacinovic.

2 Every team needs a goalscorer and Serbia certainly have one in the shape of Aleksandar Mitrovic, who has scored in his last seven internationals.

Prolific...Aleksandar Mitrovic

3 The return to form of defensive midfielder Nemanja Matic, who once again is a fixture in the Manchester United line-up. So much for those who claimed he was over the hill at 31.

Three Fear Factors

1 For reasons best known to themselves the Serbia side have not enjoyed a consistent rearguard line-up for many years. This worrying lack of common purpose and understanding was apparent in the qualifiers, notably the 5-0 thumping in Ukraine and 4-2 home loss to Portugal.

2 Luka Jovic, who in just a few months, has gone from Frankfurt goal machine to Real Madrid flop. Nor is he on the best of terms with Serbia coach Ljubisa Tumbakovic after walking out on the national squad last autumn with a supposed ankle injury.

3 Did Tumbakovic set up a hostage to fortune by describing Norway as the opponents "we wanted the least in the play-offs"? Why plant seeds of negativity?

Scotland v Israel

Improved... Andy Robertson

ISRAEL

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 A trio of formidable strikers. Guangzhou's Eran Zahavi – who netted 11 goals in qualification – Moanes Dabour of Hoffenheim and the prolific Shon Weissman, on the score-sheet week in and week out for Austrian side Wolfsberger.

2 The tactical acumen of twin-defensive midfielders, skipper Bibras Natkho and Beram Kayal. As a former Celtic player, Kayal could be particularly valuable on his return to Scotland.

3 Manor Solomon's trickery on the wing. Memorably scored for Shakhtar in a Champions League tie against Manchester City last autumn.

Three Fear Factors

1 Andi Herzog's side hardly covered themselves with glory in qualification, finishing fifth out of six teams and winning only three of their 10 games, which was their worst campaign for 24 years. "We are not professional enough," declared a visibly upset Herzog.

2 Marked defensive shortcomings include poor positional play and a failure to stop crosses into the box.

3 Herzog's disrupted preparations. The former Austrian international playmaker and his assistant, Willi Ruttensteiner, recently had to spend a fortnight in coronavirus quarantine.

Impressive...Eran Zahavi scored 11 times in qualification

SCOTLAND

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 Andy Robertson. The feisty attack-conscious left-back has to be one of the most-improved players in world football. If Scotland are to qualify he must lead the charge and needs to set the pro-active tone.

2 The massive advantage of playing in front of the Hampden Roar. Nothing like a vociferous Glaswegian "welcome" to put the opposition off their stride.

3 After starting last year as a defensive midfielder with zero international goals, John McGinn is now a completely different animal, ending 2019 with a new attacking midfield role and no fewer than seven goals for the Scots.

Three Fear Factors

1 It is 22 long years since Scotland last took part in a major international tournament – at France 98 –and such a drought of that magnitude only increases the pressure.

2 A habit of conceding too many soft goals – which is not surprising given the scant continuity at the back. In qualifying, they had six different partnerships at the heart of the back line.

3 Recent memories of under-achievement. The humiliating 3-0 defeat in Kazakhstan and a thoroughly unconvincing 2-0 win in San Marino are the sort of slipshod displays which have the Tartan Army screaming in frustration.

North Macedonia v Kosovo

Respectable...keeper Arijanet Muric helped Kosovo to third place in qualifying

KOSOVO

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 Confidence in the camp is sky high after they comfortably topped their Nations League pool and finished a respectable third in their Euro qualifying group. In the last year they have claimed the scalps of Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Montenegro.

2 The calmness under pressure, tactical know-how and people-person skills of the team's Swiss coach Bernard Challandes. He is so popular that he was recently voted Kosovo's Personality of the Year.

3 Rising star striker Milot Rashica. Thanks to the 23-year-old's great work with the national team and Werder Bremen he has been heavily linked with Borussia Dortmund as well as a gaggle of Premier League sides.

Three Fear Factors

1 They are a young squad, with an average age of under 25, and as such are not always as focused and grounded as they should be. They can be their own worst enemies with their impulsiveness.

2 Torino keeper Samir Ujkani and on-loan Verona centre-back Amir Rrahmani are key but they will be short of match practice as a result of Italy's coronavirus-inspired suspension.

3 Challandes has to decide whether left-winger Arber Zeneli is sufficiently match sharp as he has only just returned to the fray with Reims after rupturing cruciate ligaments last June.

NORTH MACEDONIA

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 They have two class acts in evergreen 36-year-old Genoa second striker Goran Pandev and, at the other end of the spectrum, 20-year-old Napoli midfielder Eljif Elmas. Together, the pair give the Macedonians that all-important extra dimension.

2 Being backed by a sell-out crowd in Skopje should be a big advantage. Excitement has been building for months, driven by the dream of qualifying for a first major tournament.

3 The excellent form of veteran front-runner Ivan Trichkovski, who has been scoring from all angles this season for his Cypriot club AEK Larnaca. Vitally, he can play on the wing or through the middle.

Dreams...North Macedonia's Visar Musliu (no6)

Three Fear Factors

1 With a lack of depth at full-back and in the midfield-enforcer department, they can be a little naive defensively.

2 Besides Pandev and Elmas, there are a number of other Italian-based players who may be somewhat rusty due to Serie A being shutdown over coronavirus. Udinese winger Ilija Nestorovski is one of those who comes into this category.

3 First-choice left-back Ezgjan Alioski is out of favour at Leeds United, while right-back Stefan Ristovski has fallen out with Ruben Amorim, his new coach at Sporting in Lisbon.

Georgia v Belarus

Influence...Georgia's Guram Kashia (left)

BELARUS

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 Unlike their opponents they have managed to fit in a couple of winter friendlies, recording morale-boosting 1-0 wins over Uzbekistan in the UAE and Bulgaria away in Sofia.

2 Belarus have a fine defensive linchpin in centre-back and skipper Alyaksandr Martynovich. He has spent the last decade in Russia with Krasnodar.

3 They can call on the European experience of BATE's central midfielder Stanislaw Drahun and enterprising schemer Ihar Stasevich, who also skippers the team.

Three Fear Factors

1 Defensively they are vulnerable in wide areas. Their full-backs can seem at sixes and sevens when facing tricky, pacy wingers.

2 Coach Mikhail Markhel, who replaced Igor Kriushenko in June 2019, is essentially a safety-first football thinker. In a do-or-die battle such as this, his natural conservatism could prove counter-productive.

3 In counter-attacking mode they can appear slightly clunky. Their decision making is not the best and they can be wasteful in front of goal.

Experience...Belarus midfielder Stanislaw Drahun

GEORGIA

Three Reasons to be Cheerful

1 The expertise of coach Vladimir Weiss, who worked a minor miracle when in charge of Slovakia and steering them to the round of 16 of the 2010 World Cup finals. Slovakia's sensational 3-2 victory over Italy in that tournament is his magnum opus.

2 They have influence, American style. Both centre-back Guram Kashia and left-winger Vako Qazaishvili currently earn their living Stateside with San Jose Earthquakes and they have more than 100 caps for their country between them.

3 The Georgians are very solid at the back, with the point proved by goalless home draws against Denmark and Republic of Ireland during the qualification process.

Three Fear Factors

1 There is a rather loose-knit, disparate feel to the squad, with few home-based players included and Weiss' picks spread across many different countries.

2 Doubts persist about the operational readiness of brilliant young winger Giorgi Chakvetadze. The 20-year-old is feeling his way back after spending eight months out with knee trouble.

3 Diminutive creative midfielder Jano Ananidze has always been a talented performer, both skilful and penetrative. It's a shame about his lack of consistency and commitment, though.

FEBRUARY 14-MARCH 11, 2020

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Friday February 14

AUSTRALIA: At 15 years and 325 days, Mohamed Toure becomes the youngest scorer in A-League history with a goal in Adelaide United's 2-0 win against Central Coast Mariners.
CAF SUPER CUP: Zamalek beat Esperance of Tunisia 3-1 to win the CAF Super Cup for a fourth time. The Egyptian side's coach, Patrice Carteron, won the same title last year with Morocco's Raja.
ENGLAND: Manchester City say they will appeal after they are banned from European competition for the next two seasons and fined €30m for "serious breaches" of UEFA's club licensing and financial fairplay regulations.
ITALY: The FIGC, Italian football's governing body, says FIFA should make changes to the VAR system, allowing coaches to challenge decisions and ask for technology to intervene. Serie A began using video assistant referees in 2017.
MOROCCO: VAR is used in a top-flight league game in Africa for the first time as IRT Tangier beat FUS Rabat 2-1.
REP OF IRELAND: Defending champions Dundalk kick off the new season with a 1-0 win over Derry City.

Saturday February 15

NEPAL: Two points behind Nepal Army Club going into the last game of the season, Machhindra beat the A-Division League leaders 1-0 to claim their first title.
NORTHERN IRELAND: Stephen Lowry is on target from the penalty spot as Coleraine beat his brother Philip's Crusaders side 2-1 in the League Cup Final.

Sunday February 16

PORTUGAL: Moussa Marega walks off the pitch during Porto's 2-1 win at Vitoria Guimaraes when he is subjected to racist abuse from home fans after scoring what turns out to be his side's winning goal. Team-mates and opposition players try to persuade him to stay on before he is eventually substituted.

Monday February 17

ENGLAND: Pep Guardiola confirms his commitment to Manchester City despite their UEFA ban, stating: "Whatever league we are in, I will still be here. Even if they put us in League Two, I will still be here. This is a time for sticking together."
SPAIN: Radio station SER Catalunya claims Barcelona hired a firm to produce disparaging social media posts aimed at its own players, including Lionel Messi and Gerard Pique, in an attempt to protect the reputation of president Josep Maria Bartomeu and damage the image of those who disagreed with him. The club denies any such action and "demands an immediate rectification of the information published".
USA: Ron Jans steps down as coach of Cincinnati following an MLS investigation into claims that the Dutchman made "extremely inappropriate comments" during pre-season.

Tuesday February 18

INDIA: Goa will be the first club from India to feature in the AFC Champions League group stage after finishing top of the Indian Super League regular season with a 5-0 victory over Jamshedpur.

Wednesday February 19

FIFA: Paris Saint-Germain president Nasser Al Khelaifi is charged by the Swiss Attorney General in connection with an investigation – allegedly involving ex-FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke and a third businessman – into the awarding of media rights for FIFA tournaments.

Saturday February 22

ITALY: Four Serie A games this weekend – Atalanta v Sassuolo, Internazionale v Sampdoria, Torino v Parma and Verona v Cagliari – are postponed over fears of the spread of coronavirus. Cristiano Ronaldo marks the 1,000th senior game of his career with a goal in Juventus' 2-1 win at SPAL.
NIGERIA: Kazeem "Kaka" Tiyamiyu, a 21-year-old defender with second-tier side Remo Stars, is knocked down and killed by a vehicle in an apparent hit-and-run while being questioned by police

History boy...Mohamed Toure of Adelaide United (in red)

Success...Zamalek captain Shikabala with the Egyptian Super Cup

in south-west Nigeria.

Sunday February 23

EGYPT: Following a brawl at the end of Thursday's Egyptian Super Cup, in which Zamalek beat Al Ahly on penalties, six players are banned by the FA, with Mahmoud Kahraba of Al Ahly and Zamalek's Imam Ashour suspended for the rest of the season.

FRANCE: Neymar is sent off as Paris Saint-Germain beat Bordeaux 4-3, with Edinson Cavani becoming the first player to score 200 goals for PSG.

TURKEY: In a derby clash that sees 12 bookings and three red cards, Galatasaray beat Fenerbahce 3-1 to register their first win away to their Istanbul rivals since 1999.

Monday February 24

EGYPT: The day after sanctions were handed to players and officials from both clubs following a brawl in the Egyptian Super Cup, Zamalek ➤

Fierce...Fenerbahce (blue) v Galatasaray

St Pierre & Miquelon

STEVE MENARY

Debut...AS Ilienne Amateurs (in yellow) in this season's Coupe de France

Tiny islands with big plans

After French Cup entry, CONCACAF membership is next

France's last remaining territory in North America, the tiny island chain of St Pierre & Miquelon, wants to join CONCACAF, despite the islands having a population of less than 6,000 and limited opportunities for the three clubs which have contested the local league since 1976.

Junior sides take a boat to compete in Canada's Newfoundland Cup and a side from the islands did go to Paris to compete in the Overseas Cup, but that ended in 2012.

Clubs from other French holdings, from Tahiti to the Caribbean, have played in the Coupe de France for years, but attempts to enter a club from St Pierre & Miquelon had always been rebuffed – until the French Football Federation (FFF) finally relented last season.

AS Saint Pierraise beat AS Ilienne Amateurs and AS Miquelonnaise in a domestic qualifying competition to take the islands' first-ever place in the tournament, but ambitions were realistic. As Herve Huet, president of the domestic league, explains: "[Our sides'] integration is done in the third round, not the seventh round like the other departments and territories of the Outremer. This is due to our level which is well below other ultramarine teams."

AS Saint Pierraise lost 2-1 to ALC Longvic from Dijon last term, while this season AS Ilienne Amateurs were beaten 5-1 by FC Lyon. However, the FFF wants to stimulate the game in the last remnant of its once vast North American holdings and the rising standard of the game in the territories was demonstrated in this season's cup campaign by JS Saint-Pierroise from Reunion, who beat Ligue 2 side Niort 2-1 to become only the second overseas team to reach the last 32.

In October the St Pierre league was granted associate membership of the Newfoundland & Labrador Soccer Association but Huet has bigger aspirations. With new policies in place, a bid to join CONCACAF is also being sought and Huet says: "The process has started. The bodies of the FFF must meet its president to discuss our integration. I hope to have news for the month of May 2020."

> "The process has started. The bodies of the FFF must meet its president to discuss our integration. I hope to have news for the month of May 2020"
>
> Herve Huet on joining CONCACAF

If that meeting with CONCACAF president Vincent Montagliani goes well, the St Pierre & Miquelon representative side could also be revived.

They lost all seven matches in the 2010 and 2012 editions of the Overseas Cup and further defeats would surely follow in the bottom rung of CONCACAF's Nations League, but St Pierre & Miquelon's footballers would at least have been brought in from the cold. WS

➤ fail to turn up for a league game against Al Ahly.
KOSOVO: Seventeen-year-old Ilija Ivic, who plays for Flamurtari, says he will join Kosovo's under-19 squad despite his mother being fired from her local government job following his decision to become the first Kosovan Serb to accept a call-up.
SOUTH KOREA: The start of the new K League season is postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Tuesday February 25

GREECE: UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin meets Greek prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and agrees to assist the Greek Football Federation in curbing violence and corruption in its professional leagues.
ITALY: Dries Mertens scores for Napoli in their 1-1 draw at home to Barcelona in the Champions League to equal Marek Hamsik's record of 121 goals for the club.
ZIMBABWE: Following a CAF inspection, Zimbabwe is barred from hosting international games until further notice after the country's three main stadiums – Barbourfields, Mandava and the National Sports Stadium – fail to meet required standards.

Wednesday February 26

BRAZIL: Flamengo coach Jorge Jesus collects his fifth trophy in eight months as a 3-0 victory over Independiente Del Valle gives his side a 5-2 aggregate win in the Recopa Sudamericana.

Thursday February 27

FIFA: From next season, clubs will be restricted to eight international loans in and out, subject to the approval of FIFA's players' status committee and FIFA Council. This figure will drop to six loans in and out from the 2022-23 campaign.

Saturday February 29

ENGLAND: After 18 successive wins in all competitions, Liverpool lose 3-0 at Watford and miss out on a new record for an English top-flight team. Defeat ends a 44-game unbeaten run in the Premier League.
ITALY: Lazio beat Bologna 2-0 to go top of Serie A for the first time since 2010.

Sunday March 1

ENGLAND: Manchester City beat Aston Villa 2-1 to win the League Cup for a third successive season.
GEORGIA: Formed just four years ago, Telavi make their debut in the Georgian top flight and draw 0-0 ➤

Brazil

TIM VICKERY

The power of twenty four

Shirt number has become a heated political issue

Rio de Janeiro giants Flamengo won the local Taca Guanabara tournament in February, coming from behind to beat humble opponents Boavista 2-1 in the Final, with the decisive goal scored by Gabriel Barbosa.

Nothing much of a surprise there as the game went to form and the match winner lived up to his "Gabi-goal" moniker.

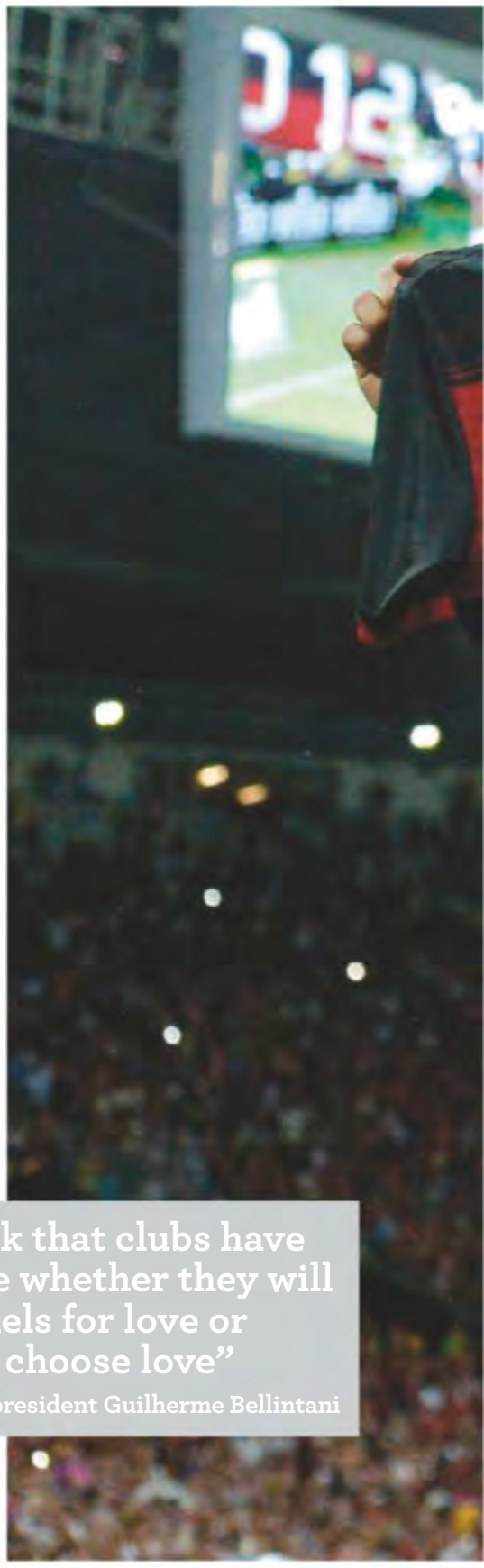
But there was something very different about Fla's star striker. Instead of the usual number nine on his back, Barbosa was wearing the number 24 shirt – which until recently would have been unthinkable.

The explanation comes with a convoluted history lesson. Back in 1892, when Baron Drummond was thinking of ways to raise funds for his zoo in Rio, he came up with the idea of a lottery in which each number bore a relation to one of his animals. His invention, the *jogo do bicho* ("animal game") proved a smash success. Although technically illegal, the lottery is tolerated and still runs today. And although it has long since lost any connection with the zoo, a link remains between one of the numbers and an animal – and 24 is the number of the deer.

The word "deer" (*veado* in Portuguese) is a pejorative term for a homosexual and it is all encompassing. In any situation of conflict it is usually the first word employed to insult a man and it echoes around football stadiums with depressing banality. Brazil is, after all, a traditional macho society.

Twenty four never usually appears on Brazilian team sheets, while in continental competitions, where number 1 to 30 are compulsory, the shirt will be handed to someone with little chance of making an appearance, hidden away with a reserve keeper. And for the country's international stars the fact that World Cup squads only go up to 23 is a huge relief.

Change ...Victor Cantillo



Statement... Gabriel Barbosa celebrates his winner against Boavista

> "We think that clubs have to choose whether they will be channels for love or hate. We choose love"
> Bahia president Guilherme Bellintani

But then Corinthians signed midfielder Victor Cantillo from Colombian side Junior. Having traditionally worn 24 in his homeland, where the number has no such connotations, Cantillo was told by Corinthians director Duilio Monteiro Alves at his official presentation in January that he would have to choose a different number because no one at the club would be using 24.

It was a foolish remark, for which Duilio later apologized, and it provoked a backlash. Why shouldn't Cantillo, or any other player for that matter, wear the number 24?

In the forefront of the reaction were Bahia, a club that in recent times has been known to frequently take progressive positions.

"Football is a channel that can be used to accentuate the worst in our society such as racism, aggression, violence and intolerance," said Bahia president Guilherme Bellintani. "But it can also be

used to serve different purposes: to spread culture, affection, sensibility, improving human relations.

"We think that clubs have to choose whether they will be channels for love or hate. We choose love."

And so, before January was out, Bahia midfielder Flavio was also proudly wearing the number 24 shirt. A campaign, "ask for the 24", was launched and others were quick to follow. Alan Ruschel of Chapecoense, a survivor of the club's air tragedy, took up the cause, as did Fluminense's veteran attacking midfielder Nene.

It is undeniable that impetus was added by the tragic death of Kobe Bryant, the basketball star who had often worn that number, and donning the 24 could also be seen as a tribute to him. But it was also striking that players were keen to associate themselves with the anti-homophobic message.

This might come across as a paradox, since Brazil has a far-right government which appears to be concerned more than anything else with promoting social conservatism. Supporters of the country's president, Jair Bolsonaro, speak endlessly of so-called "family values" and he himself has a long track record of homophobic statements. Last year, in New York, Bolsonaro declared: "Brazil can't be the country of gay tourism. We have families." And yet the world of Brazilian football, which has broadly supported Bolsonaro, has with surprising speed adopted a pro-tolerance position.

Game...*jogo do bicho* lottery

The battle will doubtlessly rage for many years to come. One judge in the sports justice system recently ruled that a terrace chant of "time of *veados*" was not homophobic – which left an obvious question: if that is not homophobic, then what is? When asked, the judge was unable to formulate a coherent reply. But society is advancing and last year Brazil's Supreme Court ruled that homophobia is a crime.

Any stigma or controversy around the number 24 shirt will now have surely been laid to rest.

Gabriel Barbosa is currently the biggest star in the domestic game. Not only is he wearing the shirt and scoring decisive goals with it, he is also helping to see off an old taboo. WS

Asia

JOHN DUERDEN

Potential... Lee Kang-in

Spanish steps

Continent's brightest talent heads to La Liga

Ever since Asian players started heading to Europe in numbers, Germany's Bundesliga and the English Premier League have been the destinations of choice. Not many ventured to Spain, and even fewer have had any success in La Liga.

Former Iran captain Javad Nekounam had a fairly solid six seasons with Osasuna but the short-lived experiences of Shunsuke Nakamura at Espanyol and Shinji Okazaki at Malaga – who both managed to shine elsewhere in Europe – have been more representative. But things are starting to change.

In January 2019, China's biggest star Wu Lei signed for Espanyol and settled quickly. In January 2020, former South Korea captain Ki Sung-yueng joined Real Mallorca. And while there is plenty of interest back in East Asia as to their exploits, there is even more excitement over two younger talents.

Lee Kang-in at Valencia and Takefusa Kubo, who is on loan at Real Mallorca from Real Madrid, are 19 and 18 respectively, and there are high hopes back home for both. Having already made their senior international debuts, it is hoped that they will be mainstays of the South Korea and Japan national teams respectively for years to come.

> "One of the most promising young players in the world"
> Real Madrid on signing Takefusa Kubo in 2019

Lee first captured the attention of his nation as a seven-year-old in a team called Shoot Dori in a popular reality TV show in which a group of children were trained by famous football figures in Korea and competed against other teams. Lee blew the opposition – and the coaches – away.

At the age of 11 he signed for Valencia and went on to make his debut in a Copa Del Rey match in 2018. By that time Valencia had inserted a buyout clause in his contract of €80million and there was talk in the Spanish media of naturalising the player – with the benefit that he would be able to avoid Korean military service – which did not go down well back in Seoul and was swiftly quashed by Lee's father.

The attacking midfielder made his La Liga debut in early 2019 but really made an international name for himself at the Under-20 World Cup where he scored two goals and made another four. With his impressive close control and dribbling skills – not to mention his passing and vision – Lee led his country to the Final and was awarded the Golden Ball as the tournament's MVP, following in the footsteps of Diego Maradona, Lionel Messi and Paul Pogba.

Having just turned 19 there is plenty of time on Lee's side and the next step is to establish himself as a regular starter at Valencia as the majority of his appearances this season have been from the bench.

Kubo has also been making waves. Just three months younger than Lee, he also went to Spain in 2011, joining Barcelona and working his way up through the youth ranks. But, when the Catalan powerhouse were found to have violated FIFA's international transfer policy for under-18 players, Kubo returned to Japan and made his J. League debut for FC Tokyo while still only 15.

Like other East Asian players who had grown up in Europe, Kubo played with more freedom and individuality than his domestic-based contemporaries, was full of confidence and less afraid to make mistakes. And, given his tender age, people were soon taking notice.

In June 2019 he made his international debut against El Salvador just five days after his 18th birthday and it was expected that a return to Barcelona was imminent.

Instead, Real Madrid nipped in and signed a player they called "one of the most promising young players in the world...with excellent technique and great vision for the game".

Loaned out to Mallorca, Spanish fans have been treated to some of his special talents this season – such as a goal against Villarreal in November that showcased his ability to find space around the area and shoot from distance. He has already demonstrated that he can handle life in La Liga and the addition of Ki Sung-yueng in a deeper role should see the youngster get plenty of advice from an old Asian hand.

If Lee and Kubo continue to improve they could be mainstays of South Korea and Japan for years to come – and may even become the first Asian stars to really shine in Spain since Paulino Alcantara scored for fun at Barcelona a century ago. WS

Return...Takefusa Kubo in action against his former club Barcelona

➤ away at defending champions Dinamo Tbilisi.

SPAIN: At 19, Vinicius Junior is the youngest scorer in *El Clasico* in the 21st century, getting Real Madrid's opening goal in their 2-0 victory over Barcelona.

UKRAINE: After 48 league games without defeat, Shakhtar Donetsk are beaten 1-0 at Vorskla.

USA: Inter Miami lose 1-0 to Los Angeles FC on their MLS debut.

Monday March 2

CAF: Mouad Hajji resigns as the Confederation of African Football's secretary-general for "personal reasons" as he needs a "return to Morocco as soon as possible".

UEFA: Puskas Arena in Budapest will host the 2022 Europa League Final, with Helsinki and Kazan staging the UEFA Super Cup in 2022 and 2023 respectively.

Tuesday March 3

GERMANY: Daniel Batz saves a penalty in normal time and four more in the shoot-out as Saarbrucken beat Fortuna Dusseldorf to become the first-ever fourth-tier side to reach the DFB Cup semi-finals.

Wednesday March 4

FRANCE: Kylian Mbappe scores a hat-trick as Paris Saint-Germain beat Lyon 5-1 to reach their sixth consecutive Coupe de France Final.

SPAIN: The first club outside La Liga to reach the Copa del Rey semi-finals for eight years, second-tier Mirandes' run ends with a 3-1 loss on aggregate to Real Sociedad.

Thursday March 5

FRANCE: Monaco winger Gelson Martins' season is over as the Portuguese international is handed a six-month ban for pushing referee Mikael Lesage during his side's 3-1 defeat at Nimes in February.

GREECE: Defending champions PAOK are deducted seven points for breaching ownership rules and, although still second, now trail leaders Olympiakos by 14 points. Xanthi are deducted 12 points. Both clubs have the right to appeal.

GUINEA: Nine players from second division side Etoile de Guinee are killed in a bus crash on their way to play Karifamoriah in their first match of the new season. A further 19 people are injured, with 17 of those in a serious condition.

SPAIN: Athletic Bilbao beat Granada on away goals and will play Real Sociedad in the first all-Basque Copa del Rey ➤

CAF Champions League

MARK GLEESON

No record third title for Esperance

But this year's Final could see a big derby showdown

Although there will be no record-setting third successive title for Tunisia's Esperance after they were eliminated in the CAF Champions League quarter-finals, there is the mouth-watering prospect of an intense derby in the Final. And that could mean either the fabled Cairo clash between Al Ahly and Zamalek, both long dominant forces in the African game, or the Casablanca showdown between Raja and Wydad, after the two Egyptian clubs and two Moroccan sides meet on the first two weekends of May.

The reason for the delay is the African Nations Championship in Cameroon, the tournament for quasi-national teams made up of locally based players which has been belatedly slotted into the calendar in April.

Zamalek had beaten Esperance 3-1 in the CAF Super Cup a fortnight before the two met again over two legs in the Champions League semi-finals and they repeated the feat with a 3-2 aggregate triumph.

Zamalek overcame a tumultuous month to reach the semi-finals for the first time in four years, although much of it was self-inflicted, led by their bellicose president Mortada Mansour whose emotive decision-making and bizarre pronouncements make him a colourful figure but also a bumbling menace.

Mansour has been through three coaches already this season, keeping up a long sequence of hiring and firing at will, and had clouded the build-up to the CAF Super Cup by threatening to boycott the game in Qatar because of the diplomatic stand-off between Egypt and the Middle East state.

Mansour eventually backed down and Zamalek went to Qatar, after which they travelled to Abu Dhabi for the Egyptian Super Cup, where they beat Al Ahly on penalties in a game that ended in a massive brawl between the two teams.

That led to the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) suspending Zamalek's Emam Ashour for the rest of the season, while captain Mahmoud Shikabala was banned for eight games and Abdallah Gomaa for three. Mansour was also given a three-match ban and reacted by saying he would not send his side to play in a league game against Ahly in Cairo four days later.

Ahly waited in vain for Zamalek to turn up, and when they did not arrive Mansour claimed they had sent the youth team to play the fixture but their bus got stuck in traffic on the way to the stadium. The EFA said that this was a lie and awarded Ahly the points.

It was against this backdrop that Zamalek then went into their quarter-final first leg against holders Esperance and repeated their Super Cup success with a 3-1 victory in Cairo.

A stoppage-time penalty from Mahmoud Alaa provided a two-goal advantage and provoked an attack on the ref by Esperance, who had midfielder Mohamed Ali Ben Romdhane sent off. The Tunisian side's coach Moine Chaabani and his assistant Mejdi Traoui were banned for four games while skipper Khalil

Zamalek overcame a tumultuous month to reach the semi-finals for the first time in four years, although much of it was self-inflicted

Off...referee Redouane Jiyed dismisses Esperance's Mohamed Ali Ben Romdhane

Out...Mamelodi Sundowns' Sibusiso Vilakazi takes on Al Ahly

➤ Final since 1927 at Seville's Estadio de La Cartuja.

Friday March 6

FRANCE: Saturday's game between Strasbourg and Paris Saint-Germain becomes the first Ligue 1 game to be postponed because of the coronavirus outbreak.

GERMANY: The DFB will test a "sin bin" sanction for a second yellow card rather than sending a player off with a red card at eighth-tier games and below next season.

Saturday March 7

ARGENTINA: Carlos Tevez's goal gives Boca Juniors a 1-0 victory over Gimnasia y Esgrima La Plata and seals the Primera Division title.

ENGLAND: Liverpool win 2-1 against Bournemouth to create a new English top-flight record with a 22nd consecutive home win.

GERMANY: Jadon Sancho sets up Achraf Hakimi's winner in Borussia Dortmund's 2-1 victory at Borussia Monchengladbach to equal a club record of 15 assists for the season.

Sunday March 8

ITALY: Cristiano Ronaldo plays his 1,000th professional game as Juventus beat Internazionale 2-0.

NIGERIA: Chineme Martins of top-flight side Nasarawa United collapses during a game against Katsina United and dies in hospital.

Monday March 9

ITALY: All sport in the country is suspended until at least April 3 because of coronavirus. This includes Serie A games but not

Chemmam was handed a six-game suspension and Raouf Benguit got four matches.

In the return a week later Esperance could only muster a single goal, a penalty converted by Billel Bensaha, and Zamalek now face a semi-final against Raja, who have won the competition twice before.

Raja overcame TP Mazembe Englebert from the DR Congo in another tie clouded by bad blood.

Having won their home leg 2-0, Raja were forced to change outside the stadium in the return after their changing room was vandalised but they held on despite conceding an early goal to Isaac Tshibangu.

Mazembe's reaction to the loss was to fire coach Mihayo Kazembe and move technical director Dragan Cvetkovic into the dugout.

Al Ahly will be chasing a record-extending ninth title and feeling rather smug after eliminating Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa.

Success...Raja's Ben Malango celebrates

The two clubs also met in last season's quarter-finals, where Sundowns inflicted a 5-0 first-leg thrashing on the Egyptian giants, which was their heaviest defeat in 77 years. However, this time round Al Ahly won the first leg with two goals from Tunisian international full-back Ali Maaloul. In the return they extended their aggregate lead with an own goal from Sundowns striker Lebohang Maboe and eventually progressed 3-1 on aggregate.

Last season's runners-up Wydad are through to the semis for a fourth time in the last five editions after eliminating Etoile Sahel with left-back Mohamed Nahiri scoring both goals at home in the first leg before winning 2-1 on aggregate. WS

matches involving club sides or national teams participating in international competitions.

WORLD CUP: FIFA and the AFC agree to postpone the Asian World Cup qualifying matches in March and June due to the coronavirus.

Tuesday March 10

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Olimpia of Honduras win a game in the knockout stage of the tournament for the first time, beating Montreal Impact 2-1 away in their quarter-final first leg.

INDIA: Former La Liga striker Baba Diawara scores his 10th goal in the last nine games to give Mohun Bagan a 1-0 win over Aizwal and secure the I-League title with four games to spare.

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Last season's runners-up Tottenham Hotspur are knocked out by RB Leipzig, who are joined in the last eight by debutants Atalanta after they beat Valencia 4-3, with Josip Ilicic scoring all four goals.

Wednesday March 11

HOLLAND: Former Bayer Leverkusen and Beijing Guoan coach Roger Schmidt agrees to take charge of PSV next season.

ITALY: Andrea Pirlo, who retired in 2017 after a short stint in MLS with New York City FC, is reported to have agreed a return to Juventus next season as coach of their under-23 side, who play in Serie C.

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE: Atletico Madrid knock out holders Liverpool, while Paris Saint-Germain beat Borussia Dortmund. WS

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

FEBRUARY 2020

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS

Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (Barcelona)	17
ALISSON (Liverpool)	10
Thibaut COURTOIS (Real Madrid)	8
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	8
Samir HANDANOVIC (Internazionale)	7
Kasper SCHMEICHEL (Leicester City)	6
Peter GULACSI (RB Leipzig)	4
Manuel NEUER (Bayern Munich)	2
Andre ONANA (Ajax)	2
Wojciech SZCZESNY (Juventus)	2
ADRIAN (Liverpool)	1
Diogo COSTA (Porto)	1
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	1
EDERSON (Manchester City)	1
Dean HENDERSON (Sheffield United)	1
Lukas HRADECKY (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Benjamin LECOMTE (Monaco)	1
Fernando MUSLERA (Galatasaray)	1
Thomas STRAKOSHA (Lazio)	1
Rui SILVA (Granada)	1
Tomas VACLIK (Sevilla)	1

DEFENDERS

Virgil VAN DIJK (Liverpool)	42
Trent ALEXANDER-ARNOLD (Liverpool)	29
Andrew ROBERTSON (Liverpool)	16
Alphonso DAVIES (Bayern Munich)	14
Stefan DE VRIJ (Internazionale)	9
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	9
Achraf HAKIMI (Borussia Dortmund)	8
Raphael VARANE (Real Madrid)	8
Ricardo PEREIRA (Leicester City)	7
Milan SKRINIAR (Internazionale)	7
Leonardo BONUCCI (Juventus)	6
Ben CHILWELL (Leicester City)	6
Marcel HALSTENBERG (RB Leipzig)	6
Mats HUMMELS (Borussia Dortmund)	6
Ferland MENDY (Real Madrid)	6
Caglar SOYUNCU (Leicester City)	6
Benjamin PAVARD (Bayern Munich)	5
Diego GODIN (Internazionale)	4
Harry MAGUIRE (Manchester United)	4
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	4
Dayot UPAMECANO (RB Leipzig)	4
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	3
Marcos ALONSO (Chelsea)	3
Serge AURIER (Tottenham Hotspur)	3
Hans HATEBOER (Atalanta)	3
Theo HERNANDEZ (Milan)	3
Kalidou KOULIBALY (Napoli)	3
Thiago SILVA (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Nicolas TAGLIAFICO (Ajax)	3
Cesar AZPILICUETA (Chelsea)	2
Matthijs DE LIGT (Juventus)	2
Robin GOSENS (Atalanta)	2
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	2
Presnel KIMPEMBE (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
Lukas KLOSTERMANN (RB Leipzig)	2
Clement LENGLET (Barcelona)	2
Renan LODI (Atletico Madrid)	2
LUIZ FELIPE (Lazio)	2
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	2
Salif SANE (Schalke)	2
Stevan SAVIC (Atletico Madrid)	2
Chris SMALLING (Roma)	2
Alex TELLES (Porto)	2
Kieran TRIPPIER (Atletico Madrid)	2
Aaron WAN-BISSAKA (Manchester United)	2
Yunis ABDELHAMID (Reims)	1
Francesco ACERBI (Lazio)	1
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	1
Yeray ALVAREZ (Athletic Bilbao)	1
Cristian ANSALDI (Torino)	1
Youcef ATAL (Nice)	1
Sven BENDER (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Juan BERNAT (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Joao CANCELO (Manchester City)	1
Antonio CANDREVA (Internazionale)	1
Daniel CARVAJAL (Real Madrid)	1
Aurelien CHEDJOU (Amiens)	1
Juan CUADRADO (Juventus)	1
DAVID LUIZ (Arsenal)	1
Simon DELI (Club Brugge)	1
Jason DENAYER (Lyon)	1
Giovanni DI LORENZO (Napoli)	1
Ruben DIAS (Benfica)	1
Victor DIAZ (Granada)	1
Nico ELVIDI (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1
Joe GOMEZ (Liverpool)	1
GRIMALDO (Benfica)	1
Christian KABASELE (Watford)	1
Robin KNOCHE (Wolfsburg)	1
Aleksandar KOLAROV (Roma)	1
Ibrahima KONATE (RB Leipzig)	1
Filip KOSTIC (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
Marash KUMBALLA (Verona)	1
Dejan LOVREN (Liverpool)	1
Ivan MARCANO (Porto)	1
MARQUINHOS (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Joel MATIP (Liverpool)	1
Bernard MENDY (Manchester City)	1
Willi ORBAN (RB Leipzig)	1
Jose Luis PALOMINO (Atalanta)	1
PEPE (Porto)	1
Antonio RUDIGER (Chelsea)	1
Nelson SEMEDO (Barcelona)	1
John STONES (Manchester City)	1
Kyle WALKER (Manchester City)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	36
Angel DI MARIA (Paris Saint-Germain)	17
Federico VALVERDE (Real Madrid)	11
Jordan HENDERSON (Liverpool)	10
CASEMIRO (Real Madrid)	8
Bruno FERNANDES (Sporting/Manchester United)	7
Toni KROOS (Real Madrid)	7
James MADDISON (Leicester City)	6
Stefano SENSI (Internazionale)	6
THIAGO Alcantara (Bayern Munich)	6
Hakim ZIYECH (Ajax)	6
Josip ILICIC (Atalanta)	5
LUIS ALBERTO (Lazio)	5
Miralem PJANIC (Juventus)	5
Youri TIELEMANS (Leicester City)	5
Georginio WIJNALDUM (Liverpool)	5
Wilfred NDIDI (Leicester City)	4
Marcelo BROZOVIC (Internazionale)	3
Papu GOMEZ (Atalanta)	3
Ilkay GUNDOGAN (Manchester City)	3
Sergej MILINKOVIC-SAVIC (Lazio)	3
Dele ALLI (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Philippe COUTINHO (Bayern Munich)	2
Frenkie DE JONG (Barcelona)	2
Emil FORSBERG (RB Leipzig)	2
Amine HARIT (Schalke)	2
Mason MOUNT (Chelsea)	2
Christopher NKUNKU (RB Leipzig)	2
Martin ODEGAARD (Real Sociedad)	2
SAUL Niguez (Atletico Madrid)	2
Marco VERRATTI (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
ARTHUR (Barcelona)	1
Laszlo BENES (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	1
Santi CAZORLA (Villarreal)	1
FABINHO (Liverpool)	1
FELIPE ANDERSON (West Ham United)	1
FERNANDINHO (Manchester City)	1
Alexander GOLOVIN (Monaco)	1
Idrissa GUEYE (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Eden HAZARD (Real Madrid)	1
Jonas HOFMANN (Borussia M'gladbach)	1
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	1
Naby KEITA (Liverpool)	1
James MILNER (Liverpool)	1
Thomas MULLER (Bayern Munich)	1
Radja NAINGGOLAN (Cagliari)	1
Lucas OCAMPOS (Sevilla)	1
Franck RIBERY (Fiorentina)	1
RODRI (Manchester City)	1
Marcel SABITZER (RB Leipzig)	1
Bernardo SILVA (Manchester City)	1
David SILVA (Manchester City)	1
Calvin STENGS (AZ)	1
Dusan TADIC (Ajax)	1
Hans VANAKEN (Club Brugge)	1
Donny VAN DE BEEK (Ajax)	1
Axel WITSEL (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Denis ZAKARIA (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1

FORWARDS

Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	46
Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	37
Erling HAALAND (Red Bull Salzburg/Borussia Dortmund)	23
Cristiano RONALDO (Juventus)	21
Ciro IMMOBILE (Lazio)	13
Jadon SANCHO (Borussia Dortmund)	13
ROBERTO FIRMINO (Liverpool)	10
Sadio MANE (Liverpool)	9
Timo WERNER (RB Leipzig)	9
Kylian MBAPPE (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
NEYMAR (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Paulo DYBALA (Juventus)	5
Serge GNABRY (Bayern Munich)	5
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	4
Karim BENZEMA (Real Madrid)	4
Mauro ICARDI (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Donyell MALEN (PSV)	4
Lautaro MARTINEZ (Internazionale)	4
Jamie VARDY (Leicester City)	4
Islam SLIMANI (Monaco)	3
Adama TRAORE (Wolves)	3
Diogo JOTA (Wolves)	2
Dries MERTENS (Napoli)	2
Marcus RASHFORD (Manchester United)	2
Dominic CALVERT-LEWIN (Everton)	1
Ansu FATI (Barcelona)	1
Alireza JAHANBAKHSH (Brighton)	1
Romelu LUKAKU (Internazionale)	1
Quincy PROMES (Ajax)	1
Teemu PUKKI (Norwich City)	1
Ismaila SARR (Watford)	1
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	1
Luis SUAREZ (Barcelona)	1

ESM – EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

The members of ESM are: A Bola (Portugal), Elf Voetbal (Holland), Fanatik (Turkey), Frankfurter Allegmeine Zeitung (Germany), Goal News (Greece), Kicker (Germany), Marca (Spain), Nemzeti Sport (Hungary), So Foot (France), Sport (Belgium), Sport Express (Russia), De Telegraaf (Holland), TIPSbladet (Denmark), World Soccer (England). More details of votes at **worldsoccer.com/votes**

Second best... Robert Lewandowski

Leader...Ciro Immobile

Pos	Name	Goals	factor	points
1	**Ciro Immobile** *(Lazio)*	27	2	54
2	**Robert Lewandowski** *(Bayern Munich)*	25	2	50
3	**Erling Braut Haaland** *(Red Bull Salzburg/Borussia Dortmund)*	16/9	1.5/2	42
	Cristiano Ronaldo *(Juventus)*	21	2	42
	Timo Werner *(RB Leipzig)*	21	2	42

Pos	Name	Goals	Factor	Pts
6	**KYLIAN MBAPPE** *(Paris Saint-Germain)*	18	2	36
	LIONEL MESSI *(Barcelona)*	18	2	36
8	**PIERRE-EMERICK AUBAMEYANG** *(Arsenal)*	17	2	34
	ROMELU LUKAKU *(Internazionale)*	17	2	34
	JAMIE VARDY *(Leicester City)*	17	2	34
	WISSAM BEN YEDDER *(Monaco)*	17	2	34
12	**SERGIO AGUERO** *(Manchester City)*	16	2	32
	MOUSSA DEMBELE *(Lyon)*	16	2	32
	JOAO PEDRO *(Cagliari)*	16	2	32
15	**ODSONNE EDOUARD** *(Celtic)*	21	1.5	31.5
16	**ERIK SORGA** *(Flora Tallinn)*	31	1	31
17	**JOSIP ILICIC** *(Atalanta)*	15	2	30
	DANNY INGS *(Southampton)*	15	2	30
	MOHAMED SALAH *(Liverpool)*	15	2	30
	IVAN TRICKOVSKI *(AEK Larnaca)*	20	1.5	30
	SHON WEISSMAN *(Wolfsberger)*	20	1.5	30
22	**ILIA SHKURIN** *(Energetik BGU Minsk)*	19	1.5	28.5
	ALEXANDER SORLOTH *(Trabzonspor)*	19	1.5	28.5
24	**MARCUS RASHFORD** *(Manchester United)*	14	2	28
	JADON SANCHO *(Borussia Dortmund)*	14	2	28
26	**JONATHAN DAVID** *(Gent)*	18	1.5	27
	DIEUMERCI MBOKANI *(Antwerp)*	18	1.5	27
	JEAN-PIERRE NSAME *(Young Boys)*	18	1.5	27
29	**TAMMY ABRAHAM** *(Chelsea)*	13	2	26
	KARIM BENZEMA *(Real Madrid)*	13	2	26
	DOMINIC CALVERT-LEWIN *(Everton)*	13	2	26
	RAUL JIMENEZ *(Wolverhampton Wanderers)*	13	2	26
	SADIO MANE *(Liverpool)*	13	2	26
	LUIS MURIEL *(Atalanta)*	13	2	26
	NEYMAR *(Paris Saint-Germain)*	13	2	26
	VICTOR OSIMHEN *(Lille)*	13	2	26

Premier goals... Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang

Pos	Name	Goals	Factor	Pts
37	**YOUSSEF EL ARABI** *(Olympiakos)*	17	1.5	25.5
	KAMIL WILCZEK *(Brondby)*	17	1.5	25.5
39	**KLAEMINT OLSEN** *(Runavik)*	25	1	25
40	**PAPISS DEMBA CISSE** *(Alanyaspor)*	16	1.5	24
	PATSON DAKA *(Red Bull Salzburg)*	16	1.5	24
	HABIB DIALLO *(Metz)*	12	2	24
	EDIN DZEKO *(Roma)*	12	2	24
	MAURO ICARDI *(Paris Saint-Germain)*	12	2	24
	MIRKO MARIC *(Osijek)*	16	1.5	24
	ROBIN QUAISON *(Mainz)*	12	2	24
	CARLOS VINICIUS *(Benfica)*	16	1.5	24
48	**MOHAMED BUYA TURAY** *(Djurgarden)*	15	1.5	22.5
	CYRIEL DESSERS *(Heracles)*	15	1.5	22.5
	CHRISTOPH MONSCHEIN *(Austria Vienna)*	15	1.5	22.5
	JUNIOR MORAES *(Shakhtar Donetsk)*	15	1.5	22.5
52	**DARIO BENEDETTO** *(Marseille)*	11	2	22
	FRANCESCO CAPUTO *(Sassuolo)*	11	2	22
	SERGE GNABRY *(Bayern Munich)*	11	2	22
	ROUWEN HENNINGS *(Fortuna Dusseldorf)*	11	2	22
	HARRY KANE *(Tottenham Hotspur)*	11	2	22
	TOMISLAV KIS *(Zalgiris)*	22	1	22
	LAUTARO MARTINEZ *(Internazionale)*	11	2	22
	FLORIAN NIEDERLECHNER *(Augsburg)*	11	2	22
	LUCAS PEREZ *(Alaves)*	11	2	22
	TEEMU PUKKI *(Norwich City)*	11	2	22
	MARCO REUS *(Borussia Dortmund)*	11	2	22
	RAHEEM STERLING *(Manchester City)*	11	2	22
	LUIS SUAREZ *(Barcelona)*	11	2	22
	WOUT WEGHORST *(Wolfsburg)*	11	2	22
	DUVAN ZAPATA *(Atalanta)*	11	2	22

(standings as of 02.03.20)

Club football

SOUTH AMERICA

RECOPA

(Libertadores Cup holders, Flamengo v Sudamericana Cup holders, Independiente del Valle)

1st leg

Feb19

Independiente del Valle (Ecu) 2 (Murillo 20, Pellerano pen 90+1)
Flamengo (Bra) 2 (Bruno Henrique 65, Pedro 85)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,031. **Ref:** Gonzalez (Uru)
Independiente del Valle: Pinos - Sanchez, Schunke, Segovia, Caicedo, Pellerano, Faravelli (Mera 79), Guerrero (Cabeza 61), Franco, Murillo, Torres (Preciado 72).
Flamengo: Diego Alves - Rafinha, Rodrigo Caio (Thuler 84), Gustavo Henrique, Filipe Luis, Willian Arao, Gerson, Everton Ribeiro, Diego (Vitinho 46), De Arrascaeta, Bruno Henrique (Pedro 68).

2nd leg

Feb 26

Flamengo 3 (Gabriel Barbosa 19, Gerson 62, 89)
Independiente del Valle 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 69,986. **Ref:** Rapallini (Arg)
Flamengo 5-2 on agg
Flamengo: Diego Alves - Rafinha, Gustavo Henrique, Leo Pereira, Filipe Luis, Everton Ribeiro (Michael 88), Willian Arao, Gerson, De Arrascaeta (Vitinho 75), Gabriel Barbosa, Pedro (Thiago Maia 27). *Sent off: Willian Arao 23.*
Independiente del Valle: Pinos - Preciado, Schunke, Segovia (Cabeza 66), Caicedo (Guerrero 55), Pellerano, Faravelli (Dani Nieto 75), Sanchez, Franco, Murillo, Torres.
Sent off: Cabeza 86.

LIBERTADORES CUP

1st qualifying round

1st legs - Jan 21/22; 2nd legs - Jan 28/29

Carabobo (Ven) v Universitario (Per)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
Progreso (Uru) v Barcelona (Ecu)
0-2, 1-3 (agg 1-5)
San Jose (Bol) v Guarani (Par)
0-1, 0-4 (agg 0-5)

2nd qualifying round

1st legs - Feb 4-6; 2nd legs - Feb11-13

Barcelona v Sporting Cristal (Per)
4-0, 1-2 (agg 5-2)
Cerro Largo (Uru) v Palestino (Chl)
1-1, 1-5 (agg 2-6)
Guarani v Corinthians (Bra)
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Guarani on away goals)
Independiente Medellin (Col) v Deportivo Tachira (Ven)
4-0, 0-2 (agg 4-2)
Macara (Ecu) v Tolima (Col)
0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)
The Strongest (Bol) v Atletico Tucuman (Arg)
2-0, 0-2 (agg 2-2, Atletico Tucuman 6-5 on pens)
Universidad de Chile (Chl) v Internacional (Bra)
0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Universitario v Cerro Porteno (Par)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)

Final qualifying round

1st legs - Feb18-20; 2nd legs - Feb 25-27

Barcelona v Cerro Porteno
1-0, 4-0 (agg 5-0)
Independiente Medellin v Atletico Tucuman
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Independiente Medellin 4-2 on pens)
Palestino v Guarani
0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3)
Tolima v Internacional
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)

● *The winning teams have qualified for the group stage; the 2 losing teams with the best record in the final qualifying round (Atletico Tucuman & Tolima) enter the Sudamericana Cup in the 2nd round*

SUDAMERICANA CUP

1st round

1st legs - Feb 4-13; 2nd legs - Feb18-27

Argentinos Juniors (Arg) v Sport Huancayo (Per) 1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Sport Huancayo on away goals); Atletico Grau (Per) v River Plate (Uru) 1-2, 0-1 (agg 1-3); Atletico Nacional (Col) v Huracan (Arg) 3-0, 1-1 (agg 4-1); Bahia (Bra) v Nacional (Par) 3-0, 3-1 (agg 6-1); Blooming (Bol) v Emelec (Ecu) 0-3, 0-2 (agg 0-5); Coquimbo Unido (Chl) v Aragua (Ven) 3-0, 0-1 (agg 3-1); Cusco (Per) v Audax Italiano (Chl) 2-0, 0-3 (agg 2-3); Deportivo Cali (Col) v River Plate (Par) 2-1, 3-1 (agg 5-2); Fenix (Uru) v El Nacional (Ecu) 1-0, 2-2 (agg 3-2); Fluminense (Bra) v Union La Calera (Chl) 1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Union La Calera on away goals); Huachipato (Chl) v Deportivo Pasto (Col) 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0); Independiente (Arg) v Fortaleza (Bra) 1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Independiente on away goals); Lanus (Arg) v Universidad Catolica (Ecu) 3-0, 0-2 (agg 3-2); Llaneros (Ven) v Liverpool (Uru) 0-2, 0-5 (agg 0-7); Millonarios (Col) v Always Ready (Bol) 2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1); Mineros (Ven) v Sportivo Luqueno (Par) 2-3, 2-2 (agg 4-5); Nacional Potosi (Bol) v Melgar (Per) 0-2, 2-0 (agg 2-2, Melgar 4-3 on pens); Sol de America (Par) v Goias (Bra) 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0); Union (Arg) v Atletico Mineiro (Bra) 3-0, 0-2 (agg 3-2); Vasco da Gama (Bra) v Oriente Petrolero (Bol) 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0); Velez Sarsfield (Arg) v Aucas (Ecu) 1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Velez Sarsfield on away goals); Zamora (Ven) v Plaza Colonia (Uru) 1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3)

AFRICA

CAF SUPER CUP

(Champions League holders, Esperance Tunis v Confederation Cup holders, Zamalek)

Feb14 - Doha, Qatar

Esperance Tunis (Tun) 1 (Benguit pen 54)
Zamalek (Egy) 3 (Obama 2, Bencharki 58, 90+5)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 19,398. **Ref:** Gomes (SAf)
Esperance Tunis: Ben Cherifia - Derbali, Yacoubi, Chemmam, Chetti, Benguit, Coulibaly, Bensaha (Ben Hammouda 69), Bonsu (Khenissi 60), Elhouni, Ouattara (Ben Choug 77).
Zamalek: Abou Gabal - Emam (Abdel Ghani 88), Alaa, Hamdy, Abdel Shafy, Zizo (Gomaa 82), Hamed, Sassi, Bencharki, Obama, Mohamed (Ounajem 90+1).

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Feb 28/29; 2nd legs - Mar 6/7

Al Ahly (Egy) v Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf)
2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
Raja Casablanca (Mor) v TP Mazembe (DRC)
2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
Wydad Casablanca (Mor) v Etoile Sahel (Tun)
2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
Zamalek (Egy) v Esperance Tunis (Tun)
3-1, 0-1 (agg 3-2)

Semi-finals draw

Raja Casablanca v Zamalek
Wydad Casablanca v Al Ahly
1st legs - May1/2; 2nd legs - May 8/9

CONFEDERATION CUP

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Mar1; 2nd legs - Mar 8

Al Masry (Egy) v RS Berkane (Mor)
2-2, 0-1 (agg 2-3)
Al Nasr (Lby) v Hassania Agadir (Mor)
0-5, 0-2 (agg 0-7)
Enyimba (Nga) v Horoya (Gui)
1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
Zanaco (Zam) v Pyramids (Egy)
0-3, 1-0 (agg 1-3)

Semi-finals draw

Pyramids v Horoya
RS Berkane v Hassania Agadir
1st legs - May 3; 2nd legs - May10

OCEANIA

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Played in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

Feb 16: Galaxy (Van) 4 Hienghene Sport (NwC) 1; Eastern Suburbs (NZ) 2 Hekari United (PNG) 1.
Feb 19: Galaxy 2 Eastern Suburbs 2; Hienghene Sport 2 Hekari United 2.
Feb 22: Hienghene Sport 0 Eastern Suburbs 4; Hekari United 2 Galaxy 1.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
E Suburbs (Q)	3	2	1	0	8	3	7
Galaxy (Q)	3	1	1	1	7	5	4
Hekari Utd	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Hienghene	3	0	1	2	3	10	1

Group B

Played in Luganville, Vanuatu

Feb 15: Lae City (PNG) 3 Henderson Eels (Sol) 3; Lautoka (Fij) 1 Malampa Revivors (Van) 1.
Feb 18: Lautoka 0 Lae City 7; Malampa Revivors 2 Henderson Eels 2.
Feb 21: Henderson Eels 3 Lautoka 2; Malampa Revivors 3 Lae City 0.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Malampa R (Q)	3	1	2	0	6	3	5
Hend'son E (Q)	3	1	2	0	8	7	5
Lae City	3	1	1	1	10	6	4
Lautoka	3	0	1	2	3	11	1

Group C

Played in Noumea, New Caledonia

Mar 1: Solomon Warriors (Sol) 1 Tiare Tahiti (Tah) 0; Tupapa Maraerenga (Coo) 0 Magenta (NwC) 3 (awarded).
Mar 4: Tupapa Maraerenga 0 Solomon Warriors 3 (awarded); Magenta 3 Tiare Tahiti 2.
Mar 7: Tiare Tahiti 3 Tupapa Maraerenga 0 (awarded); Magenta 2 Solomon Warriors 0.
● *Tupapa Maraerenga withdrew just before the group games began*

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Magenta (Q)	3	3	0	0	8	2	9
Sol Warriors (Q)	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Tiare Tahiti	3	1	0	2	5	4	3
Tupapa M	3	0	0	3	0	9	0

Group D

Played in Pirae, Tahiti

Mar 1: Ba (Fij) 0 Auckland City (NZ) 6; Lupe Ole Soaga (Soa) 0 Venus (Tah) 6.
Mar 4: Lupe Ole Soaga 4 Ba 3; Venus 0 Auckland City 1.
Mar 7: Auckland City 2 Lupe Ole Soaga 0; Venus 4 Ba 2.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland C (Q)	3	3	0	0	9	0	9
Venus (Q)	3	2	0	1	10	3	6
Lupe Ole Soaga	3	1	0	2	4	11	3
Ba	3	0	0	3	5	14	0

● *The top 2 in each group have qualified for the quarter-finals*

CONCACAF

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st round

1st legs - Feb18-20; 2nd legs - Feb 25-27

Alianza (ESv) v Tigres UANL (Mex)
2-1, 2-4 (agg 4-5)
Comunicaciones (Gtm) v America (Mex)
1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2, America 5-3 on pens)
Leon (Mex) v Los Angeles FC (USA)
2-0, 0-3 (agg 2-3)
Motagua (Hnd) v Atlanta United (USA)
1-1, 0-3 (agg 1-4)
Olimpia (Hnd) v Seattle Sounders (USA)
2-2, 2-2 (agg 4-4, Olimpia 4-2 on pens)
Portmore United (Jam) v Cruz Azul (Mex)
1-2, 0-4 (agg 1-6)
San Carlos (CR) v New York City (USA)
3-5, 0-1 (agg 3-6)
Saprissa (CR) v Montreal Impact (Can)
2-2, 0-0 (agg 2-2, Montreal on away goals)

EUROPE

EUROPA LEAGUE

Round of 32

(the 8 3rd-placed teams in the Champions League groups – marked with an asterisk – entered at this stage)

1st legs - Feb 20; 2nd legs - Feb 26-28

APOEL (Cyp) v Basle (Swi)
0-3, 0-1 (agg 0-4)
AZ Alkmaar (Hol) v LASK Linz (Aut)
1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
Bayer Leverkusen* (Ger) v Porto (Por)
2-1, 3-1 (agg 5-2)
CFR Cluj (Rom) v Sevilla (Spa)
1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Sevilla on away goals)
Club Brugge* (Blg) v Manchester United (Eng)
1-1, 0-5 (agg 1-6)
Copenhagen (Den) v Celtic (Sco)
1-1, 3-1 (agg 4-2)
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger) v Salzburg* (Aut)
4-1, 2-2 (agg 6-3)
Getafe (Spa) v Ajax* (Hol)
2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)
Ludogorets (Bul) v Internazionale* (Ita)
0-2, 1-2 (agg 1-4)
Olympiakos* (Gre) v Arsenal (Eng)
0-1, 2-1 (aet) (agg 2-2, Olympiakos on away goals)
Rangers (Sco) v Sporting Braga (Por)
3-2, 1-0 (agg 4-2)
Roma (Ita) v Gent (Blg)
1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1)
Shakhtar Donetsk* (Ukr) v Benfica* (Por)
2-1, 3-3 (agg 5-4)
Sporting Lisbon (Por) v Istanbul Basaksehir (Tur)
3-1, 1-4 (aet) (agg 4-5)
Wolfsburg (Ger) v Malmo (Swe)
2-1, 3-0 (agg 5-1)
Wolverhampton Wanderers (Eng) v Espanyol (Spa)
4-0, 2-3 (agg 6-3)

ASIA

AFC CUP

1st qualifying round

1st leg - Jan 22; 2nd leg - Jan 29

Defenders (Sri) v Paro (Bhu)
3-3, 2-2 (agg 5-5, Paro on away goals)

2nd qualifying round

1st legs - Feb 5; 2nd legs - Feb12

Abahani Dhaka (Ban) v Maziya (Mdv)
2-2, 0-0 (agg 2-2, Maziya on away goals)
Neftchi (Kyr) v Ahal (Tkm) – *Ahal disqualified for1st leg no-show; Neftchi went through*
Paro v Bengaluru (Ind)
0-1, 1-9 (agg 1-10)
Delayed game: Ulaanbaatar City (Mon) v Taipower (Tai) (Apr 7 & 14)

Final qualifying round

1st legs - Jan 21-Feb19; 2nd legs - Jan 28-Feb 26

Hilal Al Quds (Pal) v Sur (Oma)
2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)
Indera (Bru) v Yangon United (Mym)
1-6, 1-3 (agg 2-9)
Lalenok United (ETi) v PSM Makassar (Ins)
1-4, 1-3 (agg 2-7)
Maziya v Bengaluru
2-1, 2-3 (aet) (agg 4-4, Maziya 4-3 on pens)
Neftchi v Khujand (Taj)
1-0, 0-3 (aet) (agg 1-3)
Svay Rieng (Cmb) v Master 7 (Lao)
4-1, 3-0 (agg 7-1)
Delayed game: *Ulaanbaatar City OR Taipower* v Kitchee (HK) (Apr 21 & 28)

● *The winning teams have qualified for the group stage*

MALDIVES

● *The top 6 after16 rounds of games played each other once more*

2019-20 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maziya (C)	21	16	3	2	74	12	51
Eagles	21	13	6	2	56	25	45
TC Sports	21	12	5	4	42	21	41
Green Streets	21	8	5	8	45	41	29
Da Grande	21	7	6	8	33	32	27
Foakaidhoo	21	5	5	11	20	45	20
United Victory	16	4	4	8	26	41	16
Nilandhoo	16	4	2	10	24	54	14
Victory SC (R)	16	0	0	16	1	50	0

Internationals

FRIENDLIES

Sunday, February 23
Feb 23 - Sharjah, UAE
Uzbekistan 0
Belarus 1 (Nekhaychik 26)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al Ali (UAE)
Uzbekistan: Suyunov - Kholmukhamedov, Ismatullaev (Mukhiddinov 59), Zoteev, Krimets, Eshmurodov (Kobilov 46), Kodirkulov, Ismoilov, Jaloloddinov (Turgunboev 46), Sergeev (Murtazaev 46), Abdikholikov (Bozorov 46; Norkhonov 70).
Belarus: Pavlyuchenko - Politevich, Matveychik, Burko (Shvetsov 90), Pavlovets, Nekhaychik (Karpovich 90), Stasevich, Dragun, Kendysh, Korzun (Lisakovich 67), Laptev (Podstrelov 79).

Tuesday, February 25
Feb 25 - Managua
Nicaragua 0
Panama 0
Ref: Moncada (Hnd)
Nicaragua: Fox - Rosas (Fuentes 75), Quijano, Montiel (Moncada 73), Ingram (Zuniga 62), Serapio, R Rodriguez, Barrera (Arteaga 46), Treminio, Galeano (Mendieta 46), Guardado (Garcia 46).
Panama: Guerra - Ramos, Palacios, Linton, Yearwood, Nunez, Murillo (Yanis 69), Gudino (Rodriguez 61), Botello, Stephens, Clarke (Small 54).

Wednesday, February 26
Feb 26 - Sofia
Bulgaria 0
Belarus 1 (Podstrelov 15)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Farrugia Cann (Mlt)
Bulgaria: Georgiev - Turitsov, Velkov (Antov 76), Zanev, Goranov, Milanov (Tsvetkov 76), Malinov, Delev (V Popov 89), D Iliev (Nedelev 46), Tonev (Minchev 83), Isa (Kovachev 68).
Belarus: Khatkevich - Karpovich (Vegerya 90+2), Shvetsov, Poznyak, Stepanov, Yuzepchuk (Shevchenko 60; Volkov 78), Korzun, Yablonskiy, Podstrelov, Klimovich, Lisakovich (Pechenin 70).

Wednesday, March 4
Mar 4 - Guatemala City
Guatemala 0
Panama 2 (Murillo 45, Aguilar 83)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Miranda (ESv)
Guatemala: Hagen - De Leon, Pinto, Gallardo, Hernandez, Galindo (Lom 89), Saravia (Alvarez 67), Dominguez, Rosales (Barrientos 46), Arreola (Quezada 74), Vargas (Perez 46).
Panama: Calderon - Palacios, Linton, Ramos, Yearwood, Nunez (Anderson 76), Botello, Murillo (Ferrera 63), Gudino (Browne 58), Aguilar (Yanis 88), Stephens.

2020-21 UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE

Group stage draw & match schedule

● *A change of format after the completion of the 2018-19 edition of the UEFA Nations League means the relegation and promotion between the leagues has altered from that originally stated by UEFA*

● *All group games are 2020*

LEAGUE A

Group A1
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Holland, Italy, Poland

Sep 4: Holland v Poland; Italy v Bosnia-Herzegovina.
Sep 7: Bosnia-Herzegovina v Poland; Holland v Italy.
Oct 8: Bosnia-Herzegovina v Holland; Poland v Italy.
Oct 11: Italy v Holland; Poland v Bosnia-Herzegovina.
Nov 14: Holland v Bosnia-Herzegovina; Italy v Poland.
Nov 17: Bosnia-Herzegovina v Italy; Poland v Holland.

Group A2
Belgium, Denmark, England, Iceland

Sep 5: Denmark v Belgium; Iceland v England.
Sep 8: Belgium v Iceland; Denmark v England.
Oct 9: England v Belgium; Iceland v Denmark.
Oct 12: England v Denmark; Iceland v Belgium.
Nov 12: Belgium v England; Denmark v Iceland.
Nov 15: Belgium v Denmark; England v Iceland.

Group A3
Croatia, France, Portugal, Sweden

Sep 5: Portugal v Croatia; Sweden v France.
Sep 8: France v Croatia; Sweden v Portugal.
Oct 9: Croatia v Sweden; France v Portugal.
Oct 12: Croatia v France; Portugal v Sweden.
Nov 12: Portugal v France; Sweden v Croatia.
Nov 15: Croatia v Portugal; France v Sweden.

Group A4
Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine

Sep 3: Germany v Spain; Ukraine v Switzerland.
Sep 6: Spain v Ukraine; Switzerland v Germany.
Oct 10: Spain v Switzerland; Ukraine v Germany.
Oct 13: Germany v Switzerland; Ukraine v Spain.
Nov 13: Germany v Ukraine; Switzerland v Spain.
Nov 16: Spain v Germany; Switzerland v Ukraine.

● *The 4 group winners progress to the UEFA Nations League finals, to be staged in June 2021; the bottom team in each group will be relegated to League B for the 2022-23 edition of the UEFA Nations League.*

LEAGUE B

Group B1
Austria, Northern Ireland, Norway, Romania

Sep 4: Norway v Austria; Romania v Northern Ireland.
Sep 7: Austria v Romania; Northern Ireland v Norway.
Oct 8: Northern Ireland v Austria; Norway v Romania.
Oct 11: Norway v Northern Ireland; Romania v Austria.
Nov 14: Austria v Northern Ireland; Romania v Norway.
Nov 17: Austria v Norway; Northern Ireland v Romania.

Group B2
Czech Republic, Israel, Scotland, Slovakia

Sep 4: Scotland v Israel; Slovakia v Czech Rep.
Sep 7: Czech Rep v Scotland; Israel v Slovakia.
Oct 8: Israel v Czech Rep; Scotland v Slovakia.
Oct 11: Scotland v Czech Rep; Slovakia v Israel.
Nov 14: Czech Rep v Israel; Slovakia v Scotland.
Nov 17: Czech Rep v Slovakia; Israel v Scotland.

Group B3
Hungary, Russia, Serbia, Turkey

Sep 3: Russia v Serbia; Turkey v Hungary.
Sep 6: Hungary v Russia; Serbia v Turkey.
Oct 9: Russia v Turkey; Serbia v Hungary.
Oct 12: Russia v Hungary; Turkey v Serbia.
Nov 14: Hungary v Serbia; Turkey v Russia.
Nov 17: Hungary v Turkey; Serbia v Russia.

Group B4
Bulgaria, Finland, Republic of Ireland, Wales

Sep 3: Bulgaria v Republic of Ireland; Finland v Wales.
Sep 6: Republic of Ireland v Finland; Wales v Bulgaria.
Oct 10: Finland v Bulgaria; Republic of Ireland v Wales.
Oct 13: Bulgaria v Wales; Finland v Republic of Ireland.
Nov 13: Bulgaria v Finland; Wales v Republic of Ireland.
Nov 16: Republic of Ireland v Bulgaria; Wales v Finland.

● *The 4 group winners will be promoted to League A for the 2022-23 UEFA Nations League; the bottom team in each group will be relegated to League C for the 2022-23 edition*

LEAGUE C

Group C1
Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Montenegro

Sep 5: Azerbaijan v Luxembourg; Cyprus v Montenegro.
Sep 8: Cyprus v Azerbaijan; Luxembourg v Montenegro.
Oct 9: Luxembourg v Cyprus; Montenegro v Azerbaijan.
Oct 12: Azerbaijan v Cyprus; Montenegro v Luxembourg.
Nov 12: Azerbaijan v Montenegro; Cyprus v Luxembourg.
Nov 15: Luxembourg v Azerbaijan; Montenegro v Cyprus.

Group C2
Armenia, Estonia, Georgia, North Macedonia

Sep 5: Estonia v Georgia; North Macedonia v Armenia.
Sep 8: Armenia v Estonia; Georgia v North Macedonia.
Oct 8: Armenia v Georgia; Estonia v North Macedonia.
Oct 11: Estonia v Armenia; North Macedonia v Georgia.
Nov 13: Georgia v Armenia; North Macedonia v Estonia.
Nov 16: Armenia v North Macedonia; Georgia v Estonia.

Group C3
Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, Slovenia

Sep 3: Moldova v Kosovo; Slovenia v Greece.
Sep 6: Kosovo v Greece; Slovenia v Moldova.
Oct 10: Greece v Moldova; Kosovo v Slovenia.
Oct 13: Greece v Kosovo; Moldova v Slovenia.
Nov 13: Moldova v Greece; Slovenia v Kosovo.
Nov 16: Greece v Slovenia; Kosovo v Moldova.

Group C4
Albania, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Lithuania

Sep 4: Belarus v Albania; Lithuania v Kazakhstan.
Sep 7: Albania v Lithuania; Kazakhstan v Belarus.
Oct 10: Kazakhstan v Albania; Lithuania v Belarus.
Oct 13: Belarus v Kazakhstan; Lithuania v Albania.
Nov 12: Albania v Kazakhstan; Belarus v Lithuania.
Nov 15: Albania v Belarus; Kazakhstan v Lithuania.

● *The 4 group winners will be promoted to League B for the 2022-23 UEFA Nations League; the bottom teams will be paired in 2 relegation play-off ties, the winners of which will remain in League C for the 2022-23 edition, the losers of which will be relegated to League D for the 2022-23 edition (but if any one of the teams due to play in the relegation play-offs is also due to play in the 2022 World Cup qualifying play-offs, both League C relegation play-offs will be cancelled, and the 2 teams ranked lowest in the Nations League overall ranking will be relegated to League D automatically)*

LEAGUE D

Group D1
Andorra, Faroe Islands, Latvia, Malta

Sep 3: Faroe Islands v Malta; Latvia v Andorra.
Sep 6: Andorra v Faroe Islands; Malta v Latvia.
Oct 9: Andorra v Malta; Faroe Islands v Latvia.
Oct 12: Faroe Islands v Andorra; Latvia v Malta.
Nov 14: Latvia v Faroe Islands; Malta v Andorra.
Nov 17: Andorra v Latvia; Malta v Faroe Islands.

Group D2
Gibraltar, Liechtenstein, San Marino

Sep 5: Gibraltar v San Marino.
Sep 8: San Marino v Liechtenstein.
Oct 8: Liechtenstein v Gibraltar.
Oct 11: Liechtenstein v San Marino.
Nov 13: San Marino v Gibraltar.
Nov 16: Gibraltar v Liechtenstein.

● *The 2 group winners will be promoted to League C for the 2022-23 UEFA Nations League*

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions; (R) = relegated; (Q) = qualified for next stage

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USA: MLS 2020

ATLANTA UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

1	Brad **GUZAN**	(35) 09.09.84
25	Alec **KANN**	(29) 08.08.90
13	Brendan **MOORE**	(27) 16.04.92

DEFENDERS

21	George **BELLO**	(18) 22.01.02
32	George **CAMPBELL**	(18) 22.06.01
19	Edgar **CASTILLO**	(33) 08.10.86
2	Franco **ESCOBAR** (Arg)	(25) 21.02.95
11	Brooks **LENNON**	(22) 22.09.97
6	Fernando **MEZA** (Arg)	(29) 21.03.90
12	Miles **ROBINSON**	(23) 14.03.97
4	Anton **WALKES** (Eng)	(23) 08.02.97

MIDFIELDERS

29	Mo **ADAMS** (Eng)	(23) 23.09.96
8	Ezequiel **BARCO** (Arg)	(20) 29.03.99
-	Manuel **CASTRO** (Arg)	(24) 27.09.95
31	Luiz **FERNANDO** (Bra)	(22) 23.06.97
20	Emerson **HYNDMAN**	(23) 09.04.96
18	Jeff **LARENTOWICZ**	(36) 05.08.83
10	Pity **MARTINEZ**	(26) 13.06.93
23	Jake **MULRANEY** (Rol)	(23) 05.04.96
5	Eric **REMEDI** (Arg)	(24) 04.06.95
9	Matheus **ROSSETTO** (Bra)	(23) 03.06.96

FORWARDS

14	Adam **JAHN**	(29) 05.01.91
7	Josef **MARTINEZ** (Ven)	(26) 19.05.93

COACH

	Frank **DE BOER** (Hol)	(49) 15.05.70

Fire man...Przemyslaw Frankowski made Poland's preliminary 2018 World Cup squad

CHICAGO FIRE

GOALKEEPERS

18	Kenneth **KRONHOLM**	(34) 14.10.85
1	Bobby **SHUTTLEWORTH**	(32) 13.05.87
32	Gabriel **SLONINA**	(15) 15.05.04
24	Connor **SPARROW**	(25) 10.05.94

DEFENDERS

3	Jonathan **BORNSTEIN**	(35) 07.11.84
5	Francisco **CALVO** (CR)	(27) 08.07.92
4	Johan **KAPPELHOF** (Hol)	(29) 05.08.90
-	Miguel **NAVARRO** (Ven)	(21) 26.02.99
20	Wyatt **OMSBERG**	(24) 21.09.95
22	Mauricio **PINEDA**	(22) 17.10.97
36	Andre **REYNOLDS**	(18) 02.05.01
-	Boris **SEKULIC** (Slk)	(28) 21.10.91
25	Nicholas **SLONINA**	(19) 20.03.01

MIDFIELDERS

-	Ignacio **ALISEDA** (Arg)	(20) 14.03.00
16	Michael **AZIRA** (Uga)	(32) 22.08.87
13	Brandt **BRONICO**	(24) 20.06.95
11	Przemyslaw **FRANKOWSKI** (Pol)	(24) 12.04.95
-	Gaston **GIMENEZ** (Arg)	(28) 27.07.91
33	Jeremiah **GUTJAHR**	(22) 10.08.97
10	Alvaro **MEDRAN** (Spa)	(26) 16.03.94
14	Djordje **MIHAILOVIC**	(21) 10.11.98
-	Luka **STOJANOVIC** (Ser)	(26) 04.01.94

FORWARDS

27	Robert **BERIC** (Sln)	(28) 17.06.91
28	Elliot **COLLIER** (NZ)	(25) 22.0.295
21	Fabian **HERBERS** (Ger)	(26) 17.08.93
9	CJ **SAPONG**	(31) 27.12.88

COACH

	Raphael **WICKY** (Swi)	(42) 26.04.77

FC CINCINNATI

GOALKEEPERS

1	Bobby **EDWARDS**	(24) 11.08.95
18	Spencer **RICHEY**	(27) 30.05.92
22	Przemyslaw **TYTON** (Pol)	(33) 04.01.87

DEFENDERS

12	Saad **ABDUL-SALAAM**	(28) 08.09.91
16	Zico **BAILEY**	(19) 27.08.00
17	Mathieu **DEPLAGNE** (Fra)	(28) 01.10.91
4	Greg **GARZA**	(28) 16.08.91
96	Andrew **GUTMAN**	(23) 02.10.96
14	Nick **HAGGLUND**	(27) 14.09.92
3	Tom **PETTERSSON** (Swe)	(29) 25.03.90
23	Maikel **VAN DER WERFF** (Hol)	(30) 22.04.89
2	Kendall **WASTON** (CR)	(32) 01.01.88

MIDFIELDERS

27	Fatai **ALASHE**	(26) 21.10.93
24	Frankie **AMAYA**	(19) 26.09.00
8	Allan **CRUZ** (CR)	(24) 24.02.96
11	Siem **DE JONG** (Hol)	(31) 28.01.89
36	Joe **GYAU**	(27) 16.09.92
26	Tommy **McCABE**	(21) 04.04.98
20	Jimmy **McLAUGHLIN**	(26) 30.04.93
6	Haris **MEDUNJANIN** (Bos)	(35) 08.03.85
25	Rey **ORTIZ**	(23) 06.01.97
9	Adrien **REGATTIN** (Mor)	(28) 22.08.91
33	Caleb **STANKO**	(26) 26.07.93

FORWARDS

81	Rashawn **DALLY** (Jam)	(23) 14.01.97
7	Yuya **KUBO** (Jap)	(26) 23.12.93
10	Jurgen **LOCADIA** (Hol)	(25) 07.11.93
31	Kekuta **MANNEH** (Gam)	(25) 04.12.94
-	Darren **MATTOCKS** (Jam)	(29) 02.09.90
19	Brandon **VAZQUEZ**	(21) 14.10.98

INTERIM COACH

	Yoann **DAMET** (Fra)	(30) 19.03.90

COLORADO RAPIDS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Clint **IRWIN**	(30) 01.04.89
15	Andre **RAWLS**	(28) 20.12.91

DEFENDERS

6	Lalas **ABUBAKAR** (Gha)	(25) 25.12.94
24	Kortne **FORD**	(24) 26.01.96
-	Jeremy **KELLY**	(22) 21.10.97
3	Drew **MOOR**	(36) 15.01.84
2	Keegan **ROSENBERRY**	(26) 11.12.93
5	Auston **TRUSTY**	(21) 12.08.98
13	Sam **VINES**	(20) 31.05.99
4	Danny **WILSON** (Sco)	(28) 27.12.91
27	Deklan **WYNNE** (NZ)	(25) 20.03.95

MIDFIELDERS

10	Kellyn **ACOSTA**	(24) 24.07.95
26	Cole **BASSETT**	(18) 28.01.01
9	Nicolas **BENEZET** (Fra)	(29) 24.02.91
20	Nicolas **MEZQUIDA** (Uru)	(28) 21.01.92
21	Younes **NAMLI** (Den)	(25) 20.06.94
28	Sam **NICHOLSON** (Sco)	(25) 20.01.95
19	Jack **PRICE** (Eng)	(27) 19.12.92

FORWARDS

23	Kei **KAMARA** (SLe)	(35) 01.09.84
7	Jonathan **LEWIS**	(22) 04.06.97
11	Diego **RUBIO** (Chl)	(26) 15.05.93
99	Andre **SHINYASHIKI** (Bra)	(22) 11.06.97

COACH

	Robin **FRASER**	(53) 17.12.66

COLUMBUS CREW

GOALKEEPERS

24	Jon **KEMPIN**	(26) 08.04.93
28	Matt **LAMPSON**	(30) 06.09.89
1	Eloy **ROOM** (Cur)	(31) 06.02.89
40	Andrew **TARBELL**	(26) 07.10.93

DEFENDERS

25	Harrison **AFFUL** (Gha)	(33) 24.07.86
2	Chris **CADDEN** (Sco)	(23) 19.09.96
14	Waylon **FRANCIS** (CR)	(29) 20.09.90
30	Aboubacar **KEITA**	(19) 06.04.00
4	Jonathan **MENSAH** (Gha)	(29) 13.07.90
44	Axel **SJOBERG** (Swe)	(28) 08.03.91
19	Milton **VALENZUELA** (Arg)	(21) 13.08.98
3	Josh **WILLIAMS**	(31) 18.04.88
5	Vito **WORMGOOR** (Hol)	(31) 16.11.88

MIDFIELDERS

8	**ARTUR** (Bra)	(24) 11.03.96
18	Sebastian **BERHALTER**	(18) 10.05.01
12	Luis **DIAZ** (CR)	(21) 06.12.98
22	Derrick **ETIENNE** (Hai)	(23) 25.11.96
16	Hector **JIMENEZ**	(31) 03.11.88
34	Youness **MOKHTAR** (Mor)	(28) 29.08.91
21	Aidan **MORRIS**	(18) 16.11.01
6	Darlington **NAGBE**	(29) 19.07.90
7	Pedro **SANTOS** (Por)	(31) 22.04.88
10	Lucas **ZELARAYAN** (Arg)	(27) 20.06.92

FORWARDS

9	Fanendo **ADI** (Nga)	(29) 10.10.90
17	Jordan **HAMILTON** (Can)	(23) 17.03.96
11	Gyasi **ZARDES**	(28) 02.09.91

HEAD COACH

	Caleb **PORTER**	(45) 18.02.75

FC DALLAS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jesse **GONZALEZ**	(24) 25.05.95
20	Jimmy **MAURER**	(31) 14.10.88
30	Kyle **ZOBECK**	(30) 06.02.90

DEFENDERS

4	**BRESSAN** (Bra)	(27) 15.01.93
-	Nkosi **BURGESS**	(24) 01.01.96
2	Reggie **CANNON**	(21) 11.06.98
24	Matt **HEDGES**	(29) 01.04.90
27	Eddie **MUNJOMA**	(21) 18.07.98
26	John **NELSON**	(21) 11.07.98
29	Bryan **REYNOLDS**	(18) 28.06.01
3	Reto **ZIEGLER** (Swi)	(34) 16.01.86

MIDFIELDERS

8	Bryan **ACOSTA** (Hon)	(26) 24.11.93
21	Michael **BARRIOS** (Col)	(28) 21.04.91
33	Edwin **CERRILLO**	(19) 03.10.00
12	Ryan **HOLLINGSHEAD**	(28) 16.04.91
11	Santiago **MOSQUERA** (Col)	(25) 07.02.95
19	Paxton **POMYKAL**	(20) 17.12.99
23	Thomas **ROBERTS**	(18) 11.05.01
5	Thiago **SANTOS** (Bra)	(30) 05.09.89
18	Brandon **SERVANIA**	(21) 12.03.99

FORWARDS

17	Francis **ATUAHENE** (Gha)	(23) 08.06.96
7	Jesus **FERREIRA**	(19) 24.12.00
13	Zdenek **ONDRASEK** (CzR)	(31) 22.12.88
16	Ricardo **PEPI**	(17) 09.01.03
9	Fafa **PICAULT**	(29) 23.02.91
31	Dante **SEALY**	(16) 17.04.03
22	Ema **TWUMASI** (Gha)	(22) 18.05.97

COACH

	Luchi **GONZALEZ**	(39) 14.07.80

DC UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

24	Bill **HAMID**	(29) 25.11.90
1	Chris **SEITZ**	(33) 12.03.87

DEFENDERS

15	Steve **BIRNBAUM**	(29) 23.01.91
13	Frederic **BRILLANT** (Fra)	(34) 26.06.85
91	Oniel **FISHER** (Jam)	(28) 22.11.91
28	Joseph **MORA** (CR)	(27) 15.01.93
3	Chris **ODOI-ATSEM**	(24) 27.05.95
23	Donovan **PINES**	(22) 07.03.98

MIDFIELDERS

7	Paul **ARRIOLA**	(25) 05.02.95
11	Yamil **ASAD** (Arg)	(25) 24.07.94
17	Emmanuel **BOATENG** (Gha)	(26) 17.01.94
4	Russell **CANOUSE**	(24) 11.06.95
18	**FELIPE** (Bra)	(29) 30.09.90
10	Edison **FLORES** (Per)	(25) 14.05.94
31	Julian **GRESSEL** (Ger)	(26) 16.12.93
5	Junior **MORENO** (Ven)	(26) 20.07.93
44	Moses **NYEMAN**	(16) 05.11.03
30	Kevin **PAREDES**	(16) 07.05.03
8	Ulises **SEGURA** (CR)	(26) 23.06.93

FORWARDS

9	Ola **KAMARA** (Nor)	(30) 15.10.89
22	Griffin **YOW**	(17) 25.09.02

COACH

	Ben **OLSEN**	(42) 03.05.77

HOUSTON DYNAMO

GOALKEEPERS

55	Cody **CROPPER**	(27) 16.02.93
1	Marko **MARIC** (Cro)	(24) 03.01.96
26	Michael **NELSON**	(25) 10.02.95

DEFENDERS

32	Kyle **ADAMS** (NZ)	(23) 20.11.96
18	Jose **BIZAMA** (Chl)	(25) 25.06.94
-	Victor **CABRERA** (Arg)	(27) 07.02.93
15	Maynor **FIGUEROA** (Hon)	(36) 02.05.83
2	Alejandro **FUENMAYOR** (Ven)	(23) 29.08.96
3	Adam **LUNDKVIST** (Swe)	(26) 20.03.94
29	Sam **JUNQUA**	(23) 09.11.96
28	Erik **MCCUE**	(19) 18.01.01
5	Aljaz **STRUNA** (Sln)	(29) 04.08.90
4	Zarek **VALENIN**	(28) 06.08.91

MIDFIELDERS

24	Darwin **CEREN** (ElS)	(30) 31.12.89
27	Boniek **GARCIA** (Hon)	(35) 04.09.84
12	Niko **HANSEN** (Den)	(25) 14.09.94
10	Tomas **MARTINEZ** (Arg)	(25) 07.03.95
11	Tommy **McNAMARA**	(29) 06.02.91
14	Marcelo **PALOMINO**	(18) 21.05.01
8	Memo **RODRIGUEZ**	(24) 27.12.95
22	Matías **VERA** (Arg)	(24) 26.10.95

FORWARDS

7	Alberth **ELIS** (Hon)	(24) 12.02.96
9	Mauro **MANOTAS** (Col)	(24) 15.07.95
21	Ronaldo **PENA** (Ven)	(23) 10.03.97
23	Darwin **QUINTERO** (Col)	(32) 19.09.87
13	Christian **RAMIREZ**	(28) 04.04.91
19	Michael **SALAZAR** (Blz)	(27) 15.11.92

COACH

	Tab **RAMOS**	(53) 21.09.66

INTER MIAMI

GOALKEEPERS

27	Drake **CALLENDER**	(22) 07.10.97
1	John **MCCARTHY**	(27) 04.07.92
31	Luis **ROBLES**	(35) 11.05.84

DEFENDERS

33	Mikey **AMBROSE**	(26) 05.10.93
20	AJ **DELAGARZA** (Gum)	(32) 04.11.87
5	Nicolas **FIGAL** (Arg)	(25) 03.04.94
25	Grant **LILLARD**	(24) 05.12.95
4	Christian **MAKOUN** (Ven)	(20) 05.03.00
18	Dylan **NEALIS**	(21) 30.07.98
2	Alvas **POWELL** (Jam)	(25) 14.07.94
3	Andres **REYES** (Col)	(20) 08.09.99
22	Ben **SWEAT**	(28) 04.09.91
29	Roman **TORRES** (Pan)	(34) 20.03.86
-	Denso **ULYSSE** (Hai)	(21) 20.11.98

MIDFIELDERS

-	George **ACOSTA**	(20) 19.01.00
16	Luis **ARGUDO**	(24) 13.12.95
14	Jay **CHAPMAN** (Can)	(26) 01.01.94
7	Lewis **MORGAN** (Sco)	(23) 30.09.96
15	David **NORMAN** (Can)	(21) 31.05.98
24	Lee **NGUYEN**	(33) 07.10.86
11	Matias **PELLEGRINI** (Arg)	(20) 11.03.00
10	Rodolfo **PIZARRO** (Mex)	(25) 15.02.94
6	Wil **TRAPP**	(27) 15.01.93
13	Victor **ULLOA** (Mex)	(28) 04.03.92

FORWARDS

12	Juan **AGUDELO**	(27) 23.11.92
21	Julian **CARRANZA** (Arg)	(19) 22.05.00
17	Jerome **KIESEWETTER**	(27) 09.02.93
19	Robbie **ROBINSON**	(21) 17.12.98

COACH

	Diego **ALONSO** (Uru)	(44) 16.04.75

LA GALAXY

GOALKEEPERS

1	David **BINGHAM**	(30) 19.10.89
12	Eric **LOPEZ**	(21) 05.03.99
41	Justin **VOM STEEG**	(22) 05.04.97

DEFENDERS

24	Danilo **ACOSTA**	(22) 17.11.97
22	Julian **ARAUJO**	(18) 13.08.01
20	Nick **DEPUY**	(25) 14.11.94
25	Rolf **FELTSCHER** (Ven)	(29) 06.10.90
21	Giancarlo **GONZALEZ** (CR)	(32) 08.02.88
3	Emiliano **INSUA** (Arg)	(31) 07.01.89
5	Daniel **STERES**	(29) 11.11.90
19	Diedie **TRAORE** (Fra)	(21) 15.01.99

MIDFIELDERS

26	Efrain **ALVAREZ** (Mex)	(17) 19.06.02
15	Joe **CORONA**	(29) 09.07.90
27	Emil **CUELLO** (Arg)	(23) 02.01.97
8	Jonathan **DOS SANTOS** (Mex)	(29) 26.04.90
7	Aleksandar **KATAI** (Ser)	(29) 06.02.91
2	Perry **KITCHEN**	(28) 29.02.92
16	Sacha **KLJESTAN**	(34) 09.09.85
17	Sebastian **LLETGET**	(27) 03.09.92
56	Jonathan **PEREZ** (Mex)	(17) 18.01.03

FORWARDS

60	Cameron **DUNBAR**	(17) 22.10.02
14	Javier **HERNANDEZ** (Mex)	(31) 01.06.88
10	Cristian **PAVON** (Arg)	(24) 21.01.96
-	Gordon **WILD** (Ger)	(24) 16.10.95
29	Ethan **ZUBAK**	(21) 15.04.98

COACH

	Guillermo **BARROS SCHELOTTO** (Arg)	(46) 04.05.73

LOS ANGELES FC

GOALKEEPERS

40	Phillip **EJIMADU**	(20) 31.08.99
23	Pablo **SISNIEGA** (Mex)	(24) 07.07.95
1	Kenneth **VERMEER** (Hol)	(34) 10.01.86

DEFENDERS

27	Tristan **BLACKMON**	(23) 12.08.96
13	Mohamed **EL MONIR** (Lby)	(27) 08.04.92
2	Jordan **HARVEY**	(36) 28.01.84
5	Dejan **JAKOVIC** (Can)	(34) 16.07.85
12	Diego **PALACIOS** (Ecu)	(20) 12.07.99
4	Eddie **SEGURA** (Col)	(23) 02.02.97
6	Danilo **SILVA** (Bra)	(33) 24.11.86

MIDFIELDERS

20	Eduard **ATUESTA** (Col)	(22) 18.06.97
7	Latif **BLESSING** (Gha)	(23) 30.12.96
11	Jose **CIFUENTES** (Ecu)	(21) 12.03.99
19	Bryce **DUKE**	(19) 28.02.01
8	Francisco **GINELLA** (Uru)	(21) 21.01.99
15	Alejandro **GUIDO**	(25) 22.03.94
14	Mark-Anthony **KAYE** (Can)	(25) 02.12.94

FORWARDS

99	Adama **DIOMANDE** (Nor)	(29) 14.02.90
-	Danny **MUSOVSKI**	(24) 30.11.95
26	Adrien **PEREZ**	(24) 13.10.95
17	Brian **RODRIGUEZ** (Uru)	(19) 20.05.00
9	Diego **ROSSI** (Uru)	(22) 05.03.98
10	Carlos **VELA** (Mex)	(31) 01.03.89
66	Bradley **WRIGHT-PHILLIPS** (Eng)	(35) 12.03.85

COACH

	Bob **BRADLEY**	(62) 03.03.58

MINNESOTA UNITED

GOALKEEPERS

99	Fred **EMMINGS** (Lux)	(16) 08.02.04
1	Tyler **MILLER**	(27) 12.03.93
18	Greg **RANJITSINGH** (Can)	(26) 18.07.93

DEFENDERS

4	Jose **AJA** (Uru)	(26) 10.05.93
15	Michael **BOXALL** (NZ)	(31) 18.08.88
2	Noah **BILLINGSLEY** (NZ)	(22) 06.08.97
77	Chase **GASPER**	(24) 25.01.96
14	Brent **KALLMAN**	(29) 04.10.90
19	Romain **METANIRE** (Mad)	(29) 28.03.90
3	Ike **OPARA**	(31) 21.02.89

MIDFIELDERS

6	Osvaldo **ALONSO** (Cub)	(34) 11.11.85
11	Thomas **CHACON** (Uru)	(19) 17.08.00
31	Hassani **DOTSON**	(22) 06.08.97
44	Raheem **EDWARDS** (Can)	(24) 17.07.95
13	Ethan **FINLAY**	(29) 06.08.90
8	Jan **GREGUS** (Slk)	(29) 29.01.91
94	Marlon **HAIRSTON**	(25) 23.03.94
5	Jacori **HAYES**	(24) 28.06.95
17	Robin **LOD** (Fin)	(26) 17.04.93
7	Kevin **MOLINO** (T&T)	(29) 17.06.90
41	James **MUSA** (NZ)	(27) 01.04.92

FORWARDS

9	Luis **AMARILLA** (Par)	(24) 25.08.95
12	Aaron **SCHOENFELD**	(29) 17.04.90
23	Mason **TOYE**	(21) 16.10.98

COACH

	Adrian **HEATH** (Eng)	(59) 11.01.61

Wide boy...Minnesota United winger Ethan Finlay

(ages as of 20.03.20)

USA: MLS 2020

MONTREAL IMPACT (Can)

GOALKEEPERS

1	Evan **BUSH**	(34) 06.03.86
23	Clement **DIOP** (Sen)	(26) 12.10.93
41	James **PANTEMIS** (Can)	(23) 21.02.97

DEFENDERS

27	Clement **BAYIHA** (Can)	(21) 08.03.99
5	Luis **BINKS** (Eng)	(18) 02.09.01
15	Zachary **BRAULT-GUILLARD** (Can)	(21) 30.12.98
4	Rudy **CAMACHO** (Fra)	(29) 05.03.91
26	Jorge **CORRALES** (Cub)	(28) 20.05.91
7	Rod **FANNI** (Fra)	(38) 06.12.81
22	Jukka **RAITALA** (Fin)	(31) 15.09.88
16	Joel **WATERMAN** (Can)	(24) 24.01.96
24	Karifa **YAO** (Can)	(19) 20.09.00

MIDFIELDERS

29	Mathieu **CHOINIERE** (Can)	(21) 07.02.99
21	Lassi **LAPPALAINEN** (Fin)	(21) 24.08.98
-	Emanuel **MACIEL** (Arg)	(22) 28.03.97
6	Samuel **PIETTE** (Can)	(25) 12.11.94
19	Steeven **SABA** (Hai)	(27) 24.02.93
14	Amar **SEJDIC** (Bos)	(23) 29.11.96
28	Shamit **SHOME** (Can)	(22) 05.09.97
17	Ballou **TABLA** (Can)	(20) 31.03.99
8	Saphir **TAIDER** (Alg)	(28) 29.02.92

FORWARDS

11	Anthony **JACKSON-HAMEL** (Can)	(26) 03.08.93
9	Bojan **KRKIC** (Spa)	(29) 28.08.90
18	Orji **OKWONKWO** (Nga)	(22) 19.01.98
30	Romell **QUIOTO** (Hon)	(28) 09.08.91
37	Maximiliano **URRUTI** (Arg)	(29) 22.02.91

COACH

	Thierry **HENRY** (Fra)	(42) 17.08.77

NASHVILLE SC

GOALKEEPERS

-	Elliot **PANICCO**	(23) 18.11.96
1	Joe **WILLIS**	(31) 10.08.88
13	Adrian **ZENDEJAS**	(24) 30.08.95

DEFENDERS

3	Jalil **ANIBABA**	(31) 19.10.88
55	Brayan **BECKELES** (Hon)	(34) 28.11.85
-	Alistair **JOHNSTON** (Can)	(21) 08.10.98
2	Daniel **LOVITZ**	(28) 27.08.91
18	Jack **MAHER**	(20) 28.10.99
94	Jimmy **MEDRANDA** (Col)	(26) 07.02.94
15	Eric **MILLER**	(27) 15.01.93
5	Miguel **NAZARIT** (Col)	(22) 20.05.97
4	Dave **ROMNEY**	(26) 12.06.93
16	Ken **TRIBBETT**	(27) 25.08.92
23	Taylor **WASHINGTON**	(26) 16.08.93
25	Walker **ZIMMERMAN**	(26) 19.05.93

MIDFIELDERS

27	Brian **ANUNGA** (Cam)	(23) 10.08.96
-	Tanner **DIETERICH**	(21) 04.05.98
20	Aníbal **GODOY** (Pan)	(30) 10.02.90
-	Luke **HAAKENSON**	(22) 10.09.97
21	Derrick **JONES**	(23) 03.03.97
22	Matt **LAGRASSA**	(27) 27.01.93
8	Randall **LEAL** (CR)	(23) 14.01.97
6	Dax **MCCARTY**	(32) 30.04.87
10	Hany **MUKHTAR** (Ger)	(24) 21.03.95

FORWARDS

11	David **ACCAM** (Gha)	(29) 28.09.90
-	Shak **ADAMS**	(21) 07.09.98
9	Dominique **BADJI** (Sen)	(27) 16.10.92
7	Abu **DANLADI** (Gha)	(24) 18.10.95
14	Daniel **RIOS** (Mex)	(24) 22.02.95
19	Alan **WINN**	(24) 18.02.96

COACH

	Gary **SMITH** (Eng)	(51) 03.12.68

Newcomers...Daniel Lovitz joined Nashville from Montreal Impact in February

NEW ENGLAND REV

GOALKEEPERS

25	Jeff **CALDWELL**	(24) 20.02.96
18	Brad **KNIGHTON**	(35) 06.02.85
30	Matt **TURNER**	(25) 24.06.94

DEFENDERS

28	Alexander **BUTTNER** (Hol)	(31) 11.02.89
15	Brandon **BYE**	(24) 29.11.95
19	Antonio **DELAMEA MLINAR** (Sln)	(28) 10.06.91
2	Andrew **FARRELL**	(27) 02.04.92
24	DeJuan **JONES**	(22) 24.06.97
4	Henry **KESSLER**	(21) 25.06.98
13	Michael **MANCIENNE** (Eng)	(32) 08.01.88
16	Seth **SINOVIC**	(33) 28.01.87

MIDFIELDERS

5	Isaac **ANGKING**	(20) 24.01.00
27	Luis **CAICEDO** (Col)	(23) 17.05.96
6	Scott **CALDWELL**	(29) 15.03.91
29	Nicolas **FIRMINO** (Bra)	(19) 30.01.01
22	Carles **GIL** (Spa)	(27) 22.11.92
72	Damian **RIVERA**	(17) 08.12.02
11	Kelyn **ROWE**	(28) 02.12.91
23	Wilfried **ZAHIBO** (Fra)	(26) 21.08.93

FOWARDS

7	Gustavo **BOU** (Arg)	(30) 18.02.90
17	Tajon **BUCHANAN** (Can)	(21) 08.02.99
9	Adam **BUKSA** (Pol)	(23) 12.07.96
10	Teal **BUNBURY**	(30) 27.02.90
14	Diego **FAGUNDEZ** (Uru)	(25) 14.02.95
70	Cristian **PENILLA** (Ecu)	(28) 02.05.91
12	Justin **RENNICKS**	(21) 20.03.99

COACH

	Bruce **ARENA**	(68) 21.09.51

NEW YORK CITY FC

GOALKEEPERS

13	Luis **BARRAZA**	(23) 08.11.96
1	Sean **JOHNSON**	(30) 31.05.89
41	Brad **STUVER**	(28) 16.04.91

DEFENDERS

6	Alexander **CALLENS** (Per)	(27) 04.05.92
4	Maxime **CHANOT** (Lux)	(30) 21.01.90
24	Tayvon **GRAY**	(17) 19.08.02
33	Sebastien **IBEAGHA**	(28) 21.01.92
22	Ronald **MATARRITA** (CR)	(25) 09.07.94
25	Joseph **SCALLY**	(17) 31.12.02
3	Anton **TINNERHOLM** (Swe)	(29) 26.02.91
20	Gudmundur **THORARINSSON** (Ice)	(27) 15.04.92

MIDFIELDERS

11	Valentin **CASTELLANOS** (Arg)	(21) 03.10.98
80	Justin **HAAK**	(18) 12.09.01
19	Jesus **MEDINA** (Par)	(22) 30.04.97
10	Maximiliano **MORALEZ** (Arg)	(33) 27.02.87
55	Keaton **PARKS**	(22) 06.08.97
8	Alexander **RING** (Fin)	(28) 09.04.91
15	Tony **ROCHA**	(26) 21.08.93
16	James **SANDS**	(19) 06.07.00
14	Juan Pablo **TORRES**	(20) 06.07.99
23	Gedion **ZELALEM**	(23) 26.01.97

FORWARDS

9	**HEBER** (Bra)	(28) 10.08.91
17	Gary **MACKAY-STEVEN** (Sco)	(29) 31.08.90
28	Alexandru **MITRITA** (Rom)	(25) 08.02.95
29	Ismael **TAJOURI-SHRADI** (Lby)	(25) 28.03.94

COACH

	Ronny **DEILA** (Nor)	(44) 21.09.75

NEW YORK RED BULLS

GOALKEEPERS

1	David **JENSEN** (Den)	(27) 25.03.92
40	Kendall **McINTOSH**	(26) 24.01.94
18	Ryan **MEARA**	(29) 15.11.90

DEFENDERS

91	Rece **BUCKMASTER**	(23) 11.07.96
6	Kyle **DUNCAN**	(22) 27.12.97
39	Mandela **EGBO** (Eng)	(22) 17.08.97
33	Aaron **LONG**	(27) 12.10.92
15	Sean **NEALIS**	(23) 22.01.97
26	Tim **PARKER**	(27) 23.02.93
3	Amro **TAREK** (Egy)	(27) 17.05.92
47	John **TOLKIN**	(17) 31.07.02

MIDFIELDERS

23	Cristian **CASSERES** (Ven)	(20) 20.01.00
27	Sean **DAVIS**	(27) 08.02.93
21	Omir **FERNANDEZ**	(21) 08.02.99
10	Alejandro **"KAKU"** Gamarra (Pan)	(25) 11.01.95
80	Chris **LEMA**	(23) 05.08.96
17	Ben **MINES**	(19) 12.05.00
19	Alex **MUYL**	(24) 30.09.95
77	Daniel **ROYER** (Aut)	(29) 22.05.90
90	Marc **RZATKOWSKI** (Ger)	(29) 02.03.90
20	Josh **SIMS** (Eng)	(22) 28.03.97
8	Jared **STROUD**	(23) 10.07.96
22	Florian **VALOT** (Fra)	(27) 13.02.93

FORWARDS

74	Tom **BARLOW**	(24) 08.07.95
25	Mathias **JORGENSEN** (Den)	(19) 20.09.00
42	Brian **WHITE**	(24) 03.02.96

COACH

	Chris **ARMAS**	(47) 27.08.72

ORLANDO CITY

GOALKEEPERS

1	Pedro **GALLESE**	(30) 23.02.90
23	Brian **ROWE**	(31) 16.11.88
31	Mason **STAJDUHAR**	(22) 02.12.97

DEFENDERS

3	Alex **DEJOHN**	(28) 10.05.91
25	**ANTONIO CARLOS** (Bra)	(27) 07.03.93
6	Robin **JANSSON** (Swe)	(28) 15.11.91
27	Kamal **MILLER** (Can)	(22) 16.05.97
4	Joao **MOUTINHO** (Por)	(22) 12.01.98
2	**RUAN** (Bra)	(24) 29.05.95
15	Rodrigo **SCHLEGEL** (Arg)	(22) 03.04.97
24	Kyle **SMITH**	(28) 09.01.92

MIDFIELDERS

33	Jordan **BENDER**	(18) 09.07.01
34	Joey **DEZART**	(21) 09.06.98
30	David **LOERA**	(21) 10.09.98
8	Sebas **MENDEZ** (Ecu)	(22) 26.04.97
21	Andres **PEREA** (Col)	(19) 14.11.00
10	Mauricio **PEREYRA** (Uru)	(30) 15.03.90
20	Uri **ROSELL** (Spa)	(27) 07.07.92
77	**ROBINHO** (Bra)	(25) 19.01.95
11	Junior **URSO** (Bra)	(31) 10.03.89

FORWARDS

13	Tesho **AKINDELE** (Can)	(27) 31.03.92
18	Daryl **DIKE**	(19) 03.06.00
14	Dom **DWYER**	(29) 30.07.90
19	Benji **MICHEL**	(22) 23.10.97
9	Chris **MUELLER**	(23) 29.08.96
17	**NANI** (Por)	(33) 17.11.86
29	Santiago **PATINO** (Col)	(23) 10.03.97

COACH

	Oscar **PAREJA** (Col)	(51) 10.08.68

PHILADELPHIA UNION

GOALKEEPERS

12	Joe **BENDIK**	(30) 25.04.89
18	Andre **BLAKE** (Jam)	(29) 21.11.90
1	Matt **FREESE**	(21) 02.09.98

DEFENDERS

78	Aurelien **COLLIN** (Fra)	(34) 08.03.86
3	Jack **ELLIOTT** (Eng)	(24) 25.08.95
28	Ray **GADDIS**	(30) 13.01.90
5	Jakob **GLESNES** (Nor)	(25) 25.03.94
15	Olivier **MBAIZO** (Cam)	(22) 15.08.97
4	Mark **McKENZIE**	(21) 25.02.99
32	Matthew **REAL**	(20) 10.07.99
27	Kai **WAGNER** (Ger)	(23) 15.02.97

MIDFIELDERS

22	Brenden **AARONSON**	(19) 22.10.00
11	Alejandro **BEDOYA**	(32) 29.04.87
2	Warren **CREAVALLE** (Guy)	(29) 14.08.90
14	Jack **DE VRIES**	(17) 28.03.02
21	Anthony **FONTANA**	(20) 14.10.99
25	**ILSINHO** (Bra)	(34) 12.10.85
8	Jose **MARTINEZ** (Ven)	(25) 07.08.94
10	Jamiro **MONTEIRO** (CVI)	(26) 23.11.93
24	Matej **ORAVEC** (Slk)	(21) 30.03.98
13	Cole **TURNER**	(18) 07.07.01

FORWARDS

20	Michee **NGALINA** (DRC)	(19) 06.04.00
23	Kacper **PRZYBYLKO** (Pol)	(26) 25.03.93
17	Sergio **SANTOS** (Bra)	(25) 04.09.94
7	Andrew **WOOTEN**	(30) 30.09.89

COACH

Jim **CURTIN**		(40) 23.06.79

PORTLAND TIMBERS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jeff **ATTINELLA**	(31) 29.09.88
12	Steve **CLARK**	(33) 29.04.86
31	Aljaz **IVACIC** (Sln)	(26) 29.12.93

DEFENDERS

18	Julio **CASCANTE** (CR)	(26) 03.10.93
15	Chris **DUVALL**	(28) 10.09.91
32	Marco **FARFAN**	(21) 12.11.98
33	Larrys **MABIALA** (DRC)	(32) 08.10.87
2	Jorge **MOREIRA** (Par)	(30) 01.02.90
25	Bill **TUILOMA** (NZ)	(24) 27.03.95
4	Jorge **VILLAFANA**	(30) 16.09.89
13	Dario **ZUPARIC** (Cro)	(27) 03.05.92

MIDFIELDERS

10	Sebastian **BLANCO** (Arg)	(30) 05.03.90
98	Blake **BODILY**	(22) 13.01.98
21	Diego **CHARA** (Col)	(33) 05.04.86
23	Yimmi **CHARA** (Col)	(28) 02.04.91
19	Tomas **CONECHNY** (Arg)	(21) 30.03.98
14	Andres **FLORES** (ElS)	(29) 31.08.90
22	Cristhian **PAREDES** (Par)	(21) 18.05.98
8	Diego **VALERI** (Arg)	(32) 15.03.88
30	Eryk **WILLIAMSON**	(22) 11.06.97
40	Renzo **ZAMBRANO** (Ven)	(25) 26.08.94

FORWARDS

27	Dairon **ASPRILLA** (Col)	(27) 25.05.92
17	Jeremy **EBOBISSE**	(23) 14.02.97
44	Marvin **LORIA** (CR)	(22) 24.04.97
9	Felipe **MORA** (Chl)	(24) 02.08.93
11	Jaroslaw **NIEZGODA** (Pol)	(25) 15.03.95
7	Andy **POLO** (Per)	(25) 29.09.94

COACH

Giovanni **SAVARESE** (Ven)		(48) 14.07.71

REAL SALT LAKE

GOALKEEPERS

18	Zac **MACMATH**	(28) 07.08.91
1	David **OCHOA**	(19) 16.01.01
51	Andrew **PUTNA**	(25) 21.10.94

DEFENDERS

15	Justen **GLAD**	(23) 28.02.97
22	Aaron **HERRERA**	(22) 06.06.97
20	Erik **HOLT**	(23) 06.09.96
2	Alvin **JONES** (T&T)	(25) 09.07.94
3	Ashtone **MORGAN** (Can)	(29) 09.02.91
14	Nedum **ONUOHA** (Eng)	(33) 12.11.86
30	Marcelo **SILVA** (Uru)	(30) 21.03.89
4	Donny **TOIA**	(27) 28.05.92

MIDFIELDERS

26	Luis **ARRIAGA**	(19) 06.01.01
5	Kyle **BECKERMAN**	(37) 23.04.82
13	Nick **BESLER**	(26) 07.05.93
16	Maikel **CHANG** (Cub)	(28) 18.04.91
8	Damir **KREILACH** (Cro)	(30) 16.04.89
25	Everton **LUIZ** (Bra)	(31) 24.05.88
-	Justin **MERAM** (Irq)	(31) 04.12.88
19	Luke **MULHOLLAND** (Eng)	(31) 07.08.88
43	Justin **PORTILLO**	(27) 09.09.92
6	Pablo **RUIZ** (Arg)	(21) 20.12.98
11	Albert **RUSNAK** (Slk)	(25) 07.07.94

FORWARDS

10	Corey **BAIRD**	(23) 21.01.97
17	Chris **GARCIA**	(17) 13.01.03
23	Milan **ILOSKI**	(20) 29.07.99
50	Sam **JOHNSON** (Lbr)	(26) 06.05.93
12	Douglas **MARTINEZ** (Hon)	(22) 05.06.97
-	Jeizon **RAMIREZ** (Ven)	(18) 24.03.01
-	Giuseppe **ROSSI** (Ita)	(33) 01.02.87
21	Tate **SCHMITT**	(22) 28.05.97
27	Julian **VAZQUEZ**	(18) 30.03.01

COACH

Freddy **JUAREZ**		(41) 01.04.78

SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES

GOALKEEPERS

12	Matt **BERSANO**	(27) 10.09.92
18	JT **MARCINKOWSKI**	(22) 09.05.97
17	Daniel **VEGA** (Arg)	(35) 03.06.84

DEFENDERS

29	Jacob **AKANYIRIGE**	(18) 30.12.01
4	Oswaldo **ALANIS** (Mex)	(31) 18.03.89
15	Tanner **BEASON**	(22) 23.03.97
23	Florian **JUNGWIRTH** (Ger)	(31) 27.01.89
37	Guram **KASHIA** (Geo)	(32) 04.07.87
24	Nick **LIMA**	(25) 17.11.94
27	Marcos **LOPEZ** (Per)	(20) 02.11.99
33	Paul **MARIE** (Fra)	(24) 24.03.95
22	Tommy **THOMPSON**	(24) 15.08.95
77	Casey **WALLS** (Eng)	(16) 01.10.03

MIDFIELDERS

26	Eric **CALVILLO**	(22) 02.01.98
21	Carlos **FIERRO** (Mex)	(25) 25.07.94
35	Gilbert **FUENTES**	(18) 21.02,02
93	**JUDSON** (Bra)	(26) 25.05.93
96	**LUIS FELIPE**	(24) 29.01.96
19	Siad **HAJI**	(20) 01.12.99
11	Vako **QAZAISHVILI** (Geo)	(27) 29.01.93
6	Shea **SALINAS**	(33) 24.06.86
14	Jackson **YUEILL**	(23) 19.03.97

FORWARDS

44	Cade **COWELL**	(16) 14.10.03
7	Magnus **ERIKSSON** (Swe)	(29) 08.04.90
10	Cristian **ESPINOZA** (Arg)	(24) 03.04.95
9	Danny **HOESEN** (Hol)	(29) 15.01.91
25	Andy **RIOS** (Arg)	(30) 01.08.89
8	Chris **WONDOLOWSKI**	(37) 28.01.83

COACH

Matias **ALMEYDA** (Arg)		(46) 21.12.73

SEATTLE SOUNDERS

GOALKEEPERS

30	Stefan **CLEVELAND**	(25) 25.05.94
24	Stefan **FREI** (Swi)	(33) 20.04.86
1	Trey **MUSE**	(20) 26.07.99

DEFENDERS

3	Xavier **ARREAGA** (Ecu)	(25) 28.09.94
28	Yeimar **GOMEZ ANDRADE** (Col)	(27) 30.06.92
33	Joevin **JONES** (T&T)	(28) 03.08.91
18	Kelvin **LEERDAM** (Sur)	(29) 24.06.90
27	Shane **O'NEILL**	(26) 02.09.93
16	Alex **ROLDAN**	(23) 28.07.96
5	Nouhou **TOLO** (Cam)	(22) 23.06.97

MIDFIELDERS

70	Handwalla **BWANA** (Ken)	(22) 25.06.97
8	Jordy **DELEM** (Mar)	(27) 18.03.93
11	Miguel **IBARRA**	(30) 15.03.90
6	**JOAO PAULO** (Bra)	(29) 08.03.91
75	Danny **LEYVA**	(16) 05.05.03
10	Nicolas **LODEIRO** (Uru)	(30) 21.03.89
7	Cristian **ROLDAN**	(24) 03.06.95
19	Harry **SHIPP**	(28) 07.11.91
4	Gustav **SVENSSON** (Swe)	(33) 07.02.87

FORWARDS

17	Will **BRUIN**	(30) 24.10.89
99	Justin **DHILLON**	(24) 06.06.95
13	Jordan **MORRIS**	(25) 26.10.94
87	Alfonso **OCAMPO-CHAVEZ**	(17) 25.03.02
9	Raul **RUIDIAZ** (Per)	(29) 25.07.90

COACH

Brian **SCHMETZER**		(57) 18.08.62

SPORTING KANSAS CITY

GOALKEEPERS

29	Tim **MELIA**	(33) 15.05.86
24	John **PULSKAMP**	(18) 19.04.01
1	Richard **SANCHEZ** (Mex)	(25) 05.04.94

DEFENDERS

2	Botond **BARATH** (Hun)	(27) 21.04.92
5	Matt **BESLER**	(33) 11.02.87
13	Amadou **DIA**	(26) 08.06.93
3	Andreu **FONTAS** (Spa)	(30) 14.11.89
26	Jaylin **LINDSEY**	(19) 27.03.00
36	Luis **MARTINS** (Por)	(27) 10.06.92
4	Roberto **PUNCEC** (Cro)	(28) 27.10.91
22	Winston **REID** (NZ)	(31) 03.07.88
16	Graham **SMITH**	(24) 25.11.95
8	Graham **ZUSI**	(33) 18.08.86

MIDFIELDERS

27	Gianluca **BUSIO**	(17) 28.05.02
28	Cameron **DUKE**	(19) 13.02.01
15	Roger **ESPINOZA** (Hon)	(33) 25.10.86
10	Felipe **GUTIERREZ** (Chl)	(29) 08.10.90
21	Felipe **HERNANDEZ** (Col)	(21) 08.06.98
17	Gadi **KINDA** (Isr)	(25) 23.03.94
75	Wan **KUZAIN**	(21) 14.09.98
6	Ilie **SANCHEZ** (Spa)	(29) 21.11.90

FORWARDS

12	Gerso **FERNANDES** (GuB)	(29) 23.02.91
23	Tyler **FREEMAN**	(17) 09.01.03
19	Erik **HURTADO**	(29) 15.11.90
9	Alan **PULIDO** (Mex)	(29) 08.03.91
7	Johnny **RUSSELL** (Sco)	(29) 08.04.90
20	Daniel **SALLOI** (Hun)	(23) 19.07.96
11	Khiry **SHELTON**	(26) 26.06.93

COACH

Peter **VERMES**		(53) 21.11.66

TORONTO FC (Can)

GOALKEEPERS

25	Alex **BONO**	(25) 25.04.94
16	Quentin **WESTBERG**	(33) 25.04.86

DEFENDERS

96	**AURO** (Bra)	(24) 23.01.96
26	Laurent **CIMAN** (Blg)	(34) 05.08.85
5	Julian **DUNN** (Can)	(19) 11.07.00
44	Omar **GONZALEZ**	(31) 11.10.88
22	Richie **LARYEA** (Can)	(25) 07.01.95
23	Chris **MAVINGA** (DRC)	(28) 26.05.91
2	Justin **MORROW**	(32) 04.10.87
12	Rocco **ROMEO** (Can)	(19) 25.03.00
3	Eriq **ZAVALETA**	(27) 02.08.92

MIDFIELDERS

4	Michael **BRADLEY**	(32) 31.07.87
18	Nick **DELEON**	(29) 17.07.90
8	Marky **DELGADO**	(24) 16.05.95
31	Tsubasa **ENDOH** (Jap)	(26) 20.08.93
27	Liam **FRASER** (Can)	(22) 13.02.98
15	Jahkeele **MARSHALL-RUTTY** (Can)	(15) 16.06.04
14	Noble **OKELLO** (Can)	(19) 20.07.00
21	Jonathan **OSORIO** (Can)	(27) 12.06.92
10	Alejandro **POZUELO** (Spa)	(28) 20.09.91

FORWARDS

99	Ifunanyachi **ACHARA** (Nga)	(22) 28.09.97
20	Ayo **AKINOLA**	(20) 20.01.00
17	Jozy **ALTIDORE**	(30) 06.11.89
19	Griffin **DORSEY**	(21) 05.03.99
9	Erickson **GALLARDO** (Ven)	(23) 26.07.96
13	Patrick **MULLINS**	(28) 05.02.92
80	Jayden **NELSON** (Can)	(17) 26.09.02
7	Pablo **PIATTI** (Arg)	(30) 31.03.89
24	Jacob **SHAFFELBURG** (Can)	(20) 26.11.99

COACH

Greg **VANNEY**		(45) 11.06.74

VANCOUVER W'CAPS (Can)

GOALKEEPERS

16	Maxime **CREPEAU** (Can)	(25) 11.04.94
51	Thomas **HASAL** (Can)	(20) 09.07.99
1	Bryan **MEREDITH**	(30) 02.08.89

DEFENDERS

53	Ali **ADNAN** (Irq)	(26) 19.12.93
13	Derek **CORNELIUS** (Can)	(22) 25.11.97
34	Gianfranco **FACCHINERI** (Can)	(17) 27.04.02
22	Erik **GODOY** (Arg)	(26) 16.08.93
3	Cristian **GUTIERREZ** (Chl)	(23) 18.02.97
20	Jasser **KHMIRI** (Tun)	(22) 27.07.97
56	Georges **MUKUMBILWA** (Can)	(20) 23.09.99
28	Jake **NERWINSKI**	(25) 17.10.94
4	Ranko **VESELINOVI** (Ser)	(20) 24.03.99

MIDFIELDERS

55	Michael **BALDISIMO** (Can)	(19) 13.04.00
54	Simon **COLYN** (Can)	(18) 23.03.02
6	**HWANG** In-beom (SKo)	(23) 20.09.96
26	Patrick **METCALFE** (Can)	(21) 11.11.98
17	Leonard **OWUSU** (Gha)	(22) 03.06.97
62	Damiano **PECILE** (Can)	(17) 11.04.02
27	Ryan **RAPOSO** (Can)	(21) 05.03.99
29	Yordy **REYNA** (Per)	(26) 16.09.93
15	Andy **ROSE** (Eng)	(30) 13.02.90
31	Russell **TEIBERT** (Can)	(27) 22.12.92

FORWARDS

14	Theo **BAIR** (Can)	(20) 27.08.99
9	Lucas **CAVALLINI** (Can)	(27) 28.12.92
11	Cristian **DAJOME** (Col)	(26) 03.01.94
7	David **MILINKOVIC** (Fra)	(25) 20.05.94
12	Fredy **MONTERO** (Can)	(32) 26.07.87
87	Tosaint **RICKETTS** (Can)	(32) 06.08.87

COACH

Marc **DOS SANTOS** (Can)		(42) 26.05.77

Close...Shenhua keeper Li Shuai in the 2017 Chinese FA Cup Final

SHANGHAI SIPG v SHANGHAI SHENHUA

Some fans in the Chinese city have had no qualms about swapping their allegiance

For most fans, supporting a team means sticking by that club through thick and thin, from cradle to grave. But in Shanghai a large number of supporters opted to desert the more established Shenhua for up-and-coming SIPG.

Founded in 1952, Shenhua have been around a lot longer than SIPG, who started out in 2005 as Shanghai East Asia.

However, the promotion and rebranding of the newcomers, in 2013, saw their support boosted by many former fans of Shenhua. And these days it is SIPG who have the upper hand on the pitch, winning the league in 2018 and finishing in the top three for each of the past five seasons.

Those that stayed loyal to Shenhua believe that their club is the one true representative of Shanghai and those that follow SIPG don't understand the culture of the city. To prove the point, Shenhua supporters will often chant in Shanghainese in order to further their claim as being the real local side in a city of 24million.

Unfortunately an early season encounter between the two at the start of this year's Chinese Super League had to be postponed following the Coronavirus outbreak. WS

Newbies...SIPG

CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS

2013 Apr 28
The two sides meet in the Chinese Super League for the first time, with Shenhua winning 2-1.

2015 May 9
SIPG come out on top for the first time, thrashing Shenhua 5-0.

2017 Nov 26
SIPG win 3-2 in the Chinese FA Cup Final at their Shanghai Stadium but Shenhua, having won 1-0 in the first leg, triumph on away goals.

2019 Jul 6
It's a sixth successive victory for SIPG as they win 3-1.

ON BOTH SIDES

XU GENBAO
● (coach) 1994-96, 2002
● (founder) 2005

FAN ZHIYI
● 1994-98
● (coach) 2010

CAO YUNDING
● 2006-10
● 2011-present

BAI JIAJUN
● 2007-12
● 2012-present

AIDI
● 2010-11, 2012
● 2018-present

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